AFTER THE BATTLE

WESTERN APPROACHES HQ
TRAGINO PARATROOP RAID
SUGAMO PRISON

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Number 81

AFTER THE BATTLE

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European Editor: Karel Margry

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Front Cover: The Area Combined Headquarters in the basement of Derby House, Liverpool — then and now. (IWM/ATB)

Centre Pages: The aqueduct at Tragino in southern Italy which was the target for Britain's first-ever offensive paratroop operation in February 1941. (Karel Margry)

Back Cover: The memorial stone which now marks the spot where the gallows stood in Sugamo Prison, Tokyo, at which the Japanese war criminals were imprisoned and executed. (Yuichi Ishikawa)

Acknowledgements: The Editor is indebted to Fred O'Brien for help with the preparation of the feature on the ACHQ, and to Yuichi Ishikawa and the staff of the Toshina Historical Museum, for assistance at Sugamo. Karel Margry would like to thank the surviving veterans of 'X' Troop and of the RAF crews of Operation 'Colossus' for their help in preparing the Tragino article. Appreciation is also extended to Gervase Cowell, the SOE Advisor of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to Graham Day of the Air Historical Branch, and to Diana Andrews of the Airborne Forces Museum.

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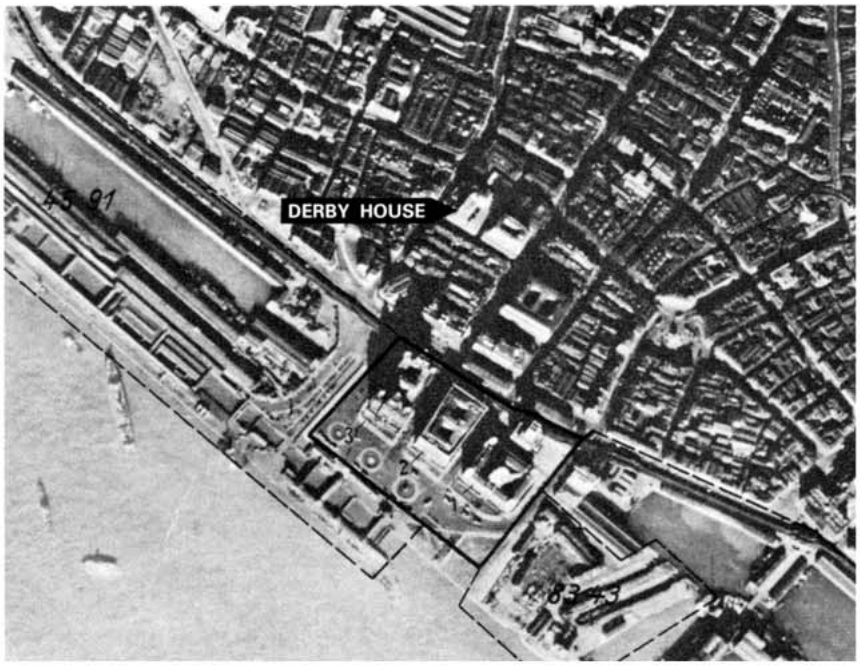
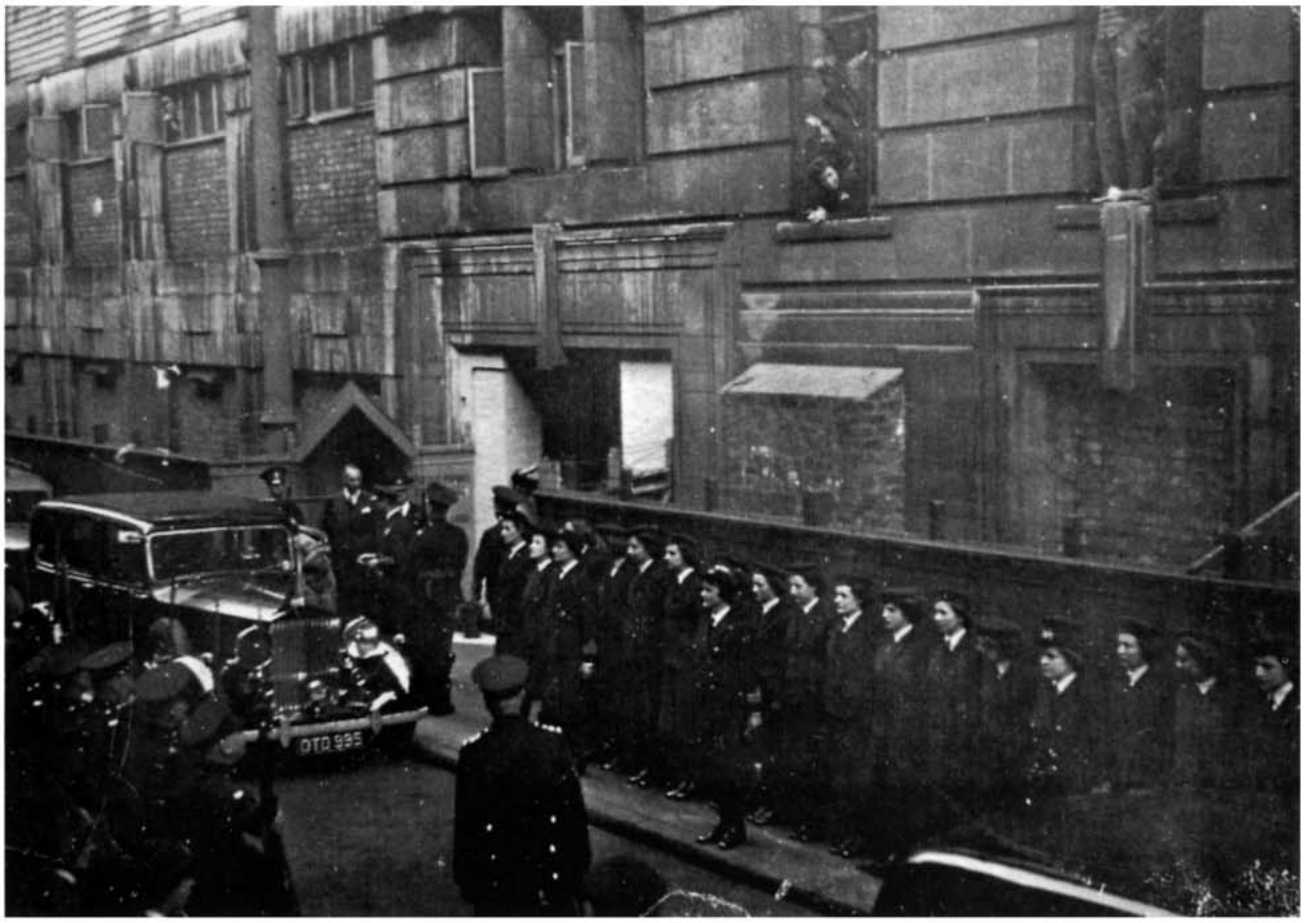
GB 4596 c
Nur für den Dienstgebrauch
n.Bild Nr. 10 60 R 36
Liverpool
Hafenverwaltung
Genst. 5. Abt. Oktober 1940
Karte 1:100 000
GB/E 12
Länge (westl. Greenw.): 2° 59' 31" Breite: 53° 24' 17"
Mißweisung: —12° 21' (Mitte 1940) Zielhöhe über NN 10 m
Maßstab 1:10 560
RIVER MERSEY
MERSEY RAILWAY
GB 4596 Hafenverwaltung (nebst 2 weiteren Verwaltungsgebäuden)
1) Dock Boarding Office, mehrstöckig, 1 Kuppelturm i.d. Mitte u. 4 Kuppeltürm. a.d. Ecken.... 5 900 qm
2) Cunard Building » , Flachdach.... 5 200 qm
3) Liver Building » , mit 2 Türmen.... 4 300 qm
bebaute Fläche... 75 400 qm
gesamte Fläche... 72 000 qm

Liverpool as an important industrial and military target had been subjected to frequent German intelligence analysis. *Above:* **The characteristic Cunard and Liver Buildings on the Mersey waterfront are outlined on this October 1940 target overprint on the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map of 1925. Between July 29, 1940 and January 10, 1942 the port and its surroundings suffered greviously from 68 Luftwaffe attacks with very heavy raids on the first eight nights of May 1941 — the so-called 'May Blitz'. The reconnaissance photo** *below* **was taken in April 1942 and, although it outlines several dockside areas as targets, it fails to pinpoint the most vital building of all — the Area Combined Headquarters (ACHQ) which had been transferred to Liverpool from Plymouth in February 1941. (The annotation showing its location is ours.)**





THE WESTERN APPROACHES HEADQUARTERS

Ceux dans les isles de longtemps assiegez,
Prendront vigeur force contre enemis:
Ceux par dehors mors de faim profligez,
En plus grand faim que jamais seront mis.

'Those besieged in the islands for a long time will take strong measures against their enemies. Those outside, overcome, will die of hunger by such starvation as has never occurred before.'

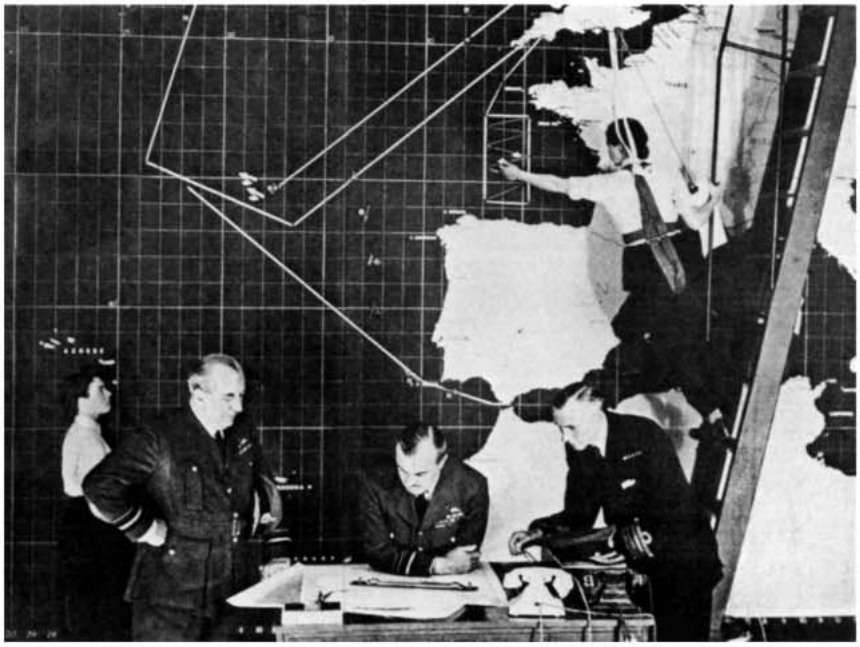
Did Nostradamus, writing in the 16th century, really predict the blockading of Britain by the German navy during the Second World War? Arguments will no doubt continue over the Prophesies as they have done for the last 400 years, yet it was Goebbels who did much to capitalise on their supposed Second World War content in his own propaganda war. No doubt, however, he will have ignored the reference to 'those besieged taking strong measures against their enemies' in this particular quatrain which appears in the 'Third Century' (number 71 of the third 100 verses).

Now, fifty years after those 'strong measures' achieved success for the Allies over the U-Boats in the Battle of the Atlantic, the operations centre in Derby House, Liverpool, which was at the very heart of that victory has been restored and opened as a memorial to those who died to achieve it.

Jan Heitmann began his address to the International 'Battle of the Atlantic' Conference — one of the many events held to mark the 50th anniversary — in May 1993 in Liverpool, by telling delegates that 'twice within a quarter of a century, German U-Boats have attacked Britain's sea communications with every means in their power, Each time, they nearly succeeded in bringing the enemy's seaborne trade to a standstill.'

At all times, whether in peace or war, Britain depends on imports — of food, raw materials like iron and steel and non-ferrous ores, timber and rubber — and the most essential of all during wartime — oil. Before the war, the United Kingdom's annual requirements totalled over 50 million tons of shipping, but by March 1941 only 30 million tons was getting through, of which, despite severe rationing, about half was essential foodstuffs. No wonder that the German U-Boat commander Admiral Karl Dönitz, who now had enough boats to start 'wolf-pack' operations in earnest, felt confident of victory.

Construction of Exchange Buildings was begun in the 1930s but only the western part — Derby House — had been completed by 1939. It was earmarked by the government for conversion into an operations centre, soon dubbed the 'Citadel' or 'Fortress' due to the extensive reinforced-concrete protection given to the basement which was to become the Operations Room. *Top:* **Their Majesty's King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited the Area Combined Headquarters on November 10, 1942. A Guard of Honour of Wrens and Royal Marines flank the entrance in Rumford Street.** *Above:* **Now the ACHQ has been restored and opened as the Western Approaches 'experience'.**



In September 1939, the West Coast ports — Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow — were under the naval operational control of Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, then Commander-in-Chief Western Approaches Command based at Plymouth. However, following the occupation of France by German forces in June 1940, Plymouth came within easy bombing range and, at the same time, was too remote for the efficient management of the huge increase in shipping now using the ports of the Mersey and Clyde. Churchill had already planned to move the HQ of Western Approaches to Liverpool and in February 1941, as soon as the work of converting Derby House into an operations centre had been completed, the new C-in-C, Admiral Sir Percy Noble *(left)*, moved in. At the same time, Air Vice-Marshal James Robb, commanding No. 15 Group, RAF, moved his HQ to provide on-the-spot liaison between Coastal Command and the Royal Navy.

In the First World War, the introduction of the British convoy system in 1917 had reduced shipping losses dramatically, and Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar Nasmith, the Commander-in-Chief Plymouth who in September 1939 was responsible for shipping in the Western Approaches to the British Isles, lost no time in introducing the same system.

For the first seven months of war, losses in merchant shipping were quite low, but the availability of the French coast ports to the German Navy from June 1940 led to a dramatic escalation in the number of ships sunk. The capture of airfields in France also enabled German long-range reconnaissance aircraft to detect Allied convoys, while at the same time the shortage of escort craft for the protection of merchant shipping was acute. Churchill summed up the position with graphic clarity: 'Battles might be won or lost, enterprises might succeed or miscarry, territories might be gained or quitted, but dominating all our power to carry on the war, or even keep ourselves alive, lay our mastery of the ocean routes and the free approach and entry to our ports.'

Churchill explained that 'As early as August 4, 1940, I had asked the Admiralty to move the controlling centre of the Western Approaches from Plymouth to the Clyde. This proposal had encountered resistance, and it was not until February 1941 that the increasing pressure of events produced Admiralty compliance. The move to the north was agreed. The Mersey was rightly chosen instead of the Clyde, and on February 17 Admiral [Sir Percy] Noble was installed in Liverpool as Commander-in-Chief of the Western Approaches. Air Chief Marshal [Sir Frederick] Bowhill, commanding the Coastal Command, worked with him in the closest intimacy. The new joint headquarters was soon operating, and from April 15 the two commands were forged into a single highly tempered weapon under the operational control of the Admiralty.'

When he was First Sea Lord, Churchill had already ordered that the basement of Derby House, part of the new Exchange Building office complex situated in Rumford Street close to the Town Hall in Liverpool, was to be converted into a bomb-proof, gas-proof command headquarters, and it was from here, as the Area Combined HQ, that the Battle of the Atlantic was master-minded over the next four years. However, in the short term, it was the U-Boats that held the advantage, with the construction of new submarines keeping well ahead of losses. Although Dönitz turned his attentions to the eastern seaboard of the United States when America entered the war, he came back to the North and mid-Atlantic with a vengeance in August 1942, with nearly eight million tons of Allied merchant shipping being sent to the bottom by the year's end.

In November, Admiral Sir Percy Noble was appointed Chief of the British Admiralty Delegation in Washington, being replaced at Western Approaches HQ by the renowned Sir Max Horton. He was one of Britain's leading First World War submariners and had been appointed Flag Officer Submarines in January 1940. Promoted to Admiral in January of the following year, his appointment on November 17, 1942 to C-in-C Western Appoaches was to signify the beginning of a new phase in the Battle of the Atlantic. As Rear-Admiral Chalmers wrote in his 1954 biography of the Admiral: 'Now, when the Atlantic life-line was stretched to its utmost limit, and the U-Boats were increasing their stranglehold, the call came for Max Horton to save his country from deadly peril.'

In November 1942, Sir Percy was succeeded by Admiral Sir Max Horton, seen here in the C-in-C's office overlooking the main Operations Room (see plan of lower ground floor). Personnel at the Derby House HQ could communicate directly with ships and aircraft, and the USA via an undersea cable, and had links with the Admiralty Trade Division Convoy Plot in London and Coastal Command headquarters at Northwood. (IWM)

This photograph of a typical scene in the ops room was published in July 1945 when the Operations Room was opened to the public for a brief period from July 16-21. [1] Convoy, United Kingdom to Far East. [2] Convoy, United Kingdom to Gibraltar. [3] Board showing current situation at sea. [4] Submarine Tracking Officer. [5] Key to symbols used on the plot. [6] Light conditions and tides at Liverpool. [7] The Convoy Control Officer. [8] Subsidiary plot for Irish Sea and local convoys. [9] Wren Plotting Officer moving convoy. [10] Wren Rating reading out information on which 9 works. [11] Wren Signal Traffic Officer. [12] Files of signals to and from ships at sea. [13] RAF (Coastal Command) Meteorological Officer. [14] Navigator checking and resetting the board. [15] RAF (Coastal Command) signal table. [16] Files of weather signals. [17] Coastal Convoy off Portugal.

The nerve centre that Admiral Noble had established at Derby House consisted of over a thousand personnel, the large majority of whom were Wrens. The command was split into three sections covering Operations, Adminstration, and Material, each controlled by a chief staff officer of captain's rank under an overall Chief-of-Staff. During Admiral Noble's command, this position was occupied by Commodore J. M. Mansfield, but he was succeeded by Commodore A. S. Russell under Admiral Horton. When Russell was taken seriously ill, he was replaced in October 1943 by Commodore I. A. P. Macintyre.

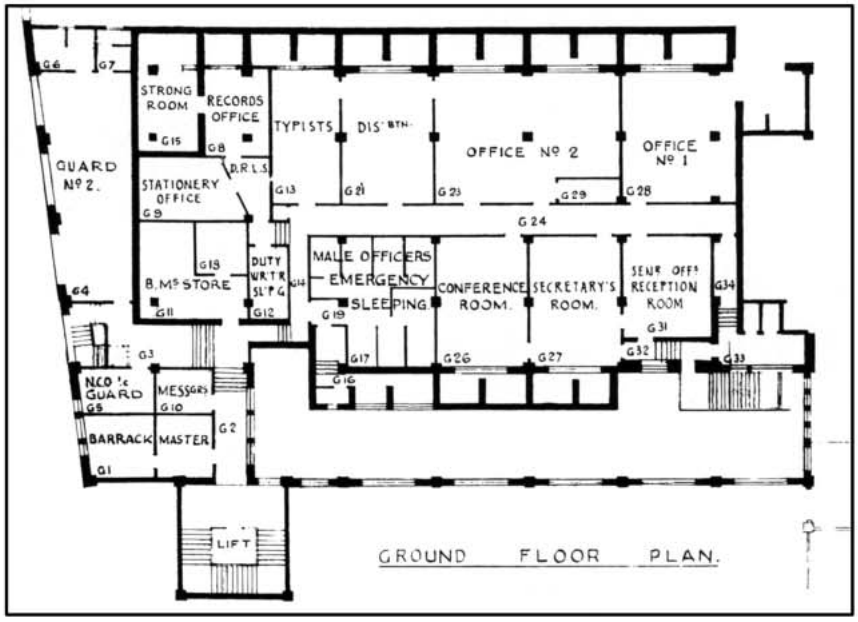
As the main purpose of the headquarters was the joint control of the naval and air forces, the Air Officer Commanding No. 15 Group, Coastal Command, Air Vice-Marshal James Robb, later succeeded by Air Vice-Marshal Sir Leonard Slatter, occupied adjoining positions overlooking the operations room. Facing them on the opposite wall was a large situation map of the North Atlantic on which was posted the position of every ship, convoy and known enemy vessel, the map being updated by Wrens using a rolling ladder.

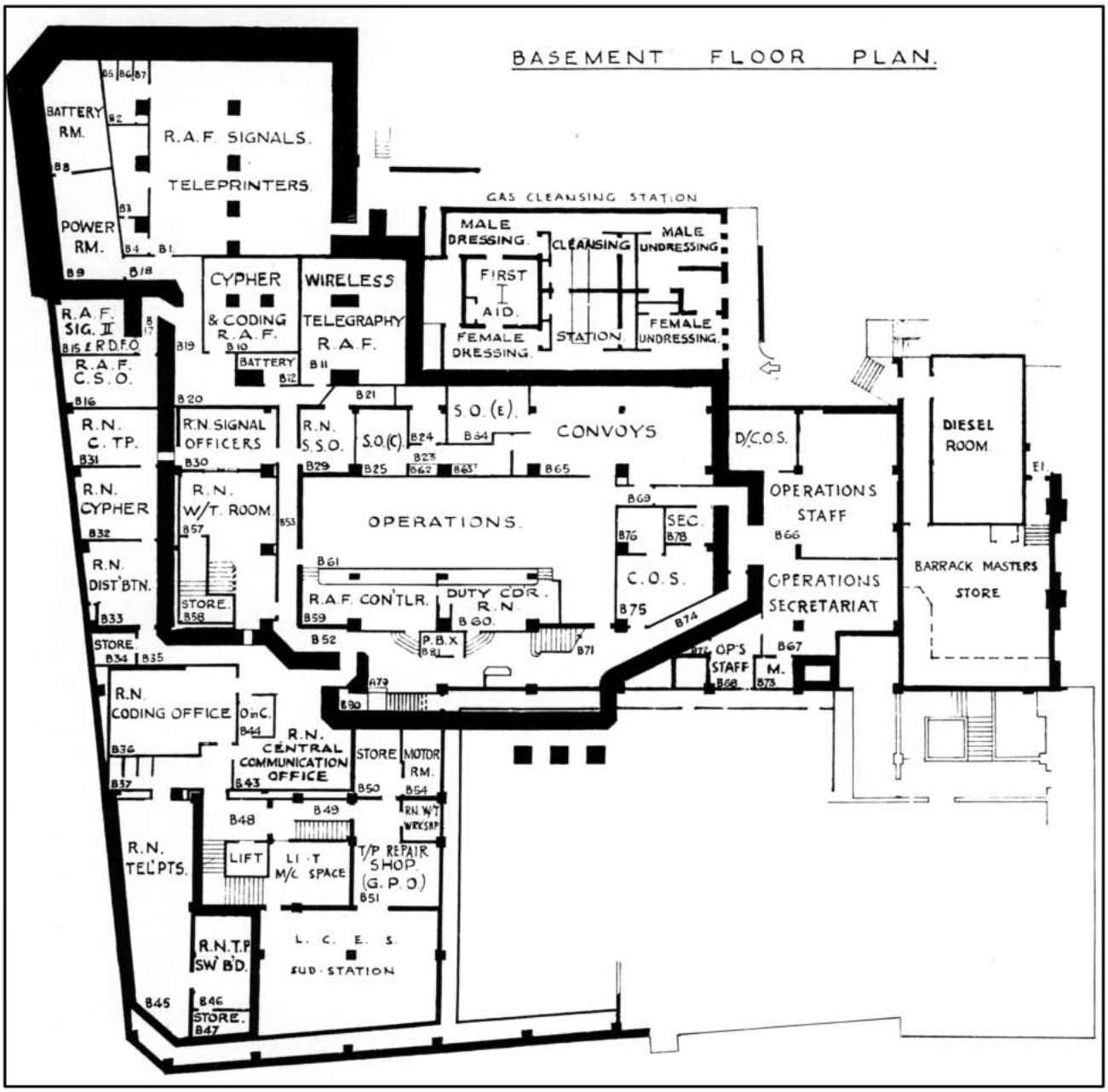
This picture was taken in January 1945 when floodlights had been brought in specifically for filming by the Army Film and Photographic Unit. (IWM)

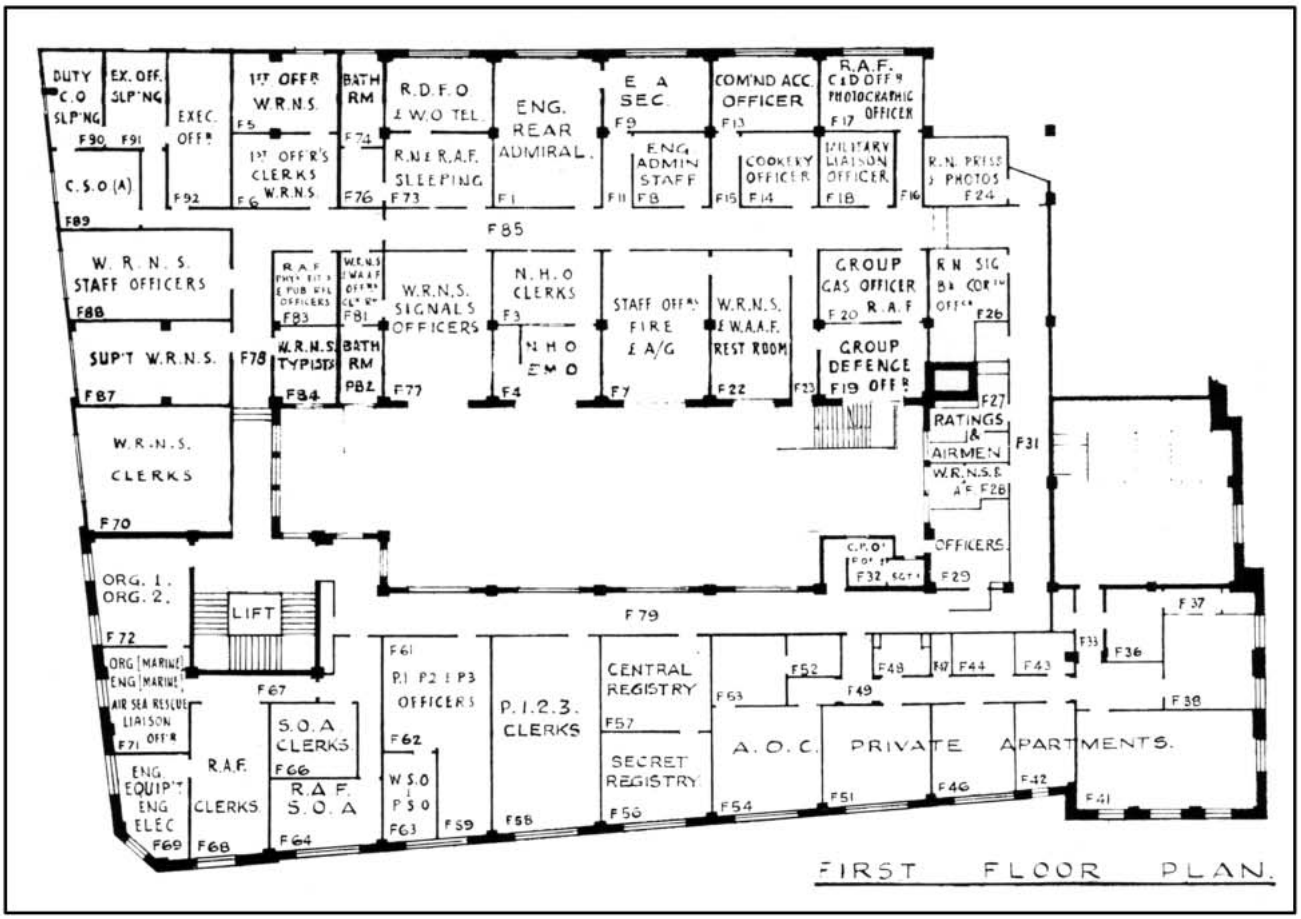
In 1940, Liverpool architects, Gunton & Gunton were instructed to draw up plans for the conversion of Derby House into the Area Combined Headquarters.

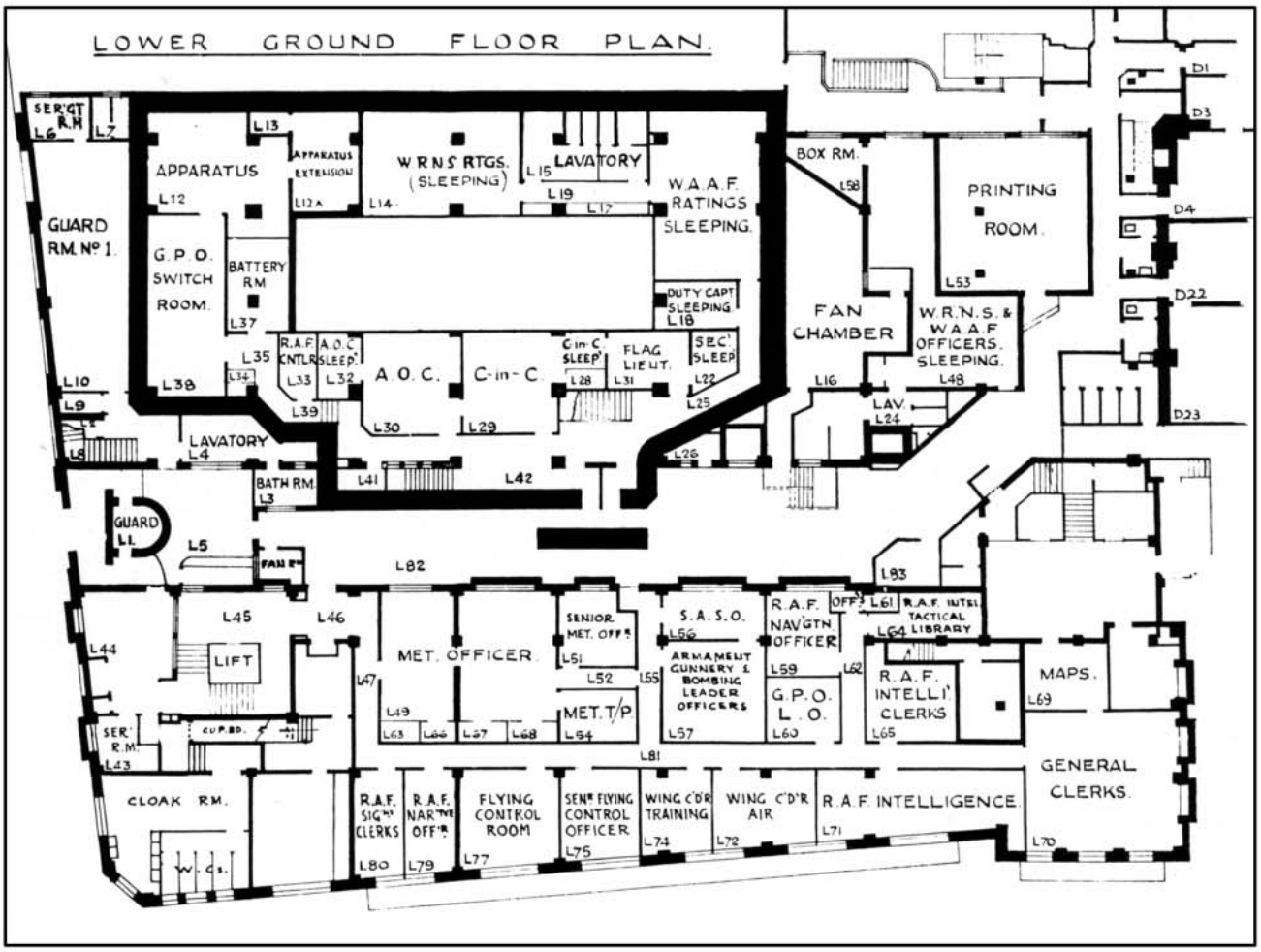
'The scene in the great Plotting Room at Derby House, with every yard of the Atlantic marked and the walls covered with the symbols of convoys, U-Boats, escorts and all sorts, changed with the arrival of Max Horton', wrote one of his staff officers. 'The graciousness, the adept handling of overworked personnel by P.N., was missing. Nobody could say that Sir Max was a boor, but he certainly was direct, and without any frills whatsover.

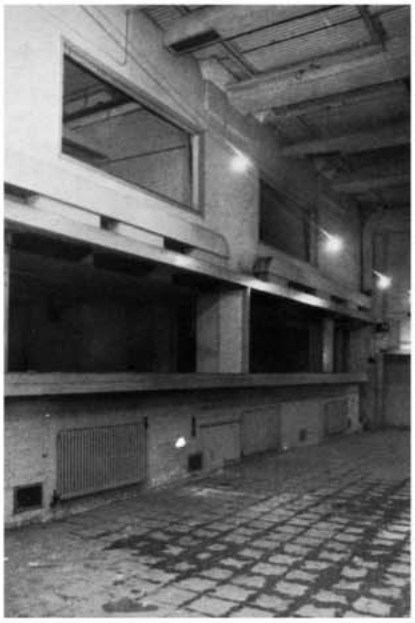
'Battles were generally fought at night now. After dinner he would arrive in the Plotting Room to watch the battle develop, to order reinforcement, to build plans for the next time. His words were always direct. "Where is . . .?", "What is . . .?", "Why is . . .?" and sometimes "Why not . . .?" or "Why the hell not . . .?" Then having grasped the situation his decision would come in a flash. I remember one night when the battle was pretty serious. It had started later than usual, and Sir Max had already turned in. He literally roared into the "Plot" in rather worn and split pyjamas, hirsute fore and aft. Those present gave him






DUTY C.O SLP'NG
EX. OFF. SLP'NG
EXEC. OFF.
1ST OFFR W.R.N.S.
1ST OFFR'S CLERKS W.R.N.S.
BATH RM
R.D.F.O & W.O TEL.
R.N. & R.A.F. SLEEPING
ENG. REAR ADMIRAL.
E A SEC.
ENG. ADMIN STAFF
COM'ND ACC. OFFICER
COOKERY OFFICER
R.A.F. C & D OFFR & PHOTOGRAPHIC OFFICER
MILITARY LIAISON OFFICER
R.N. PRESS & PHOTOS
C.S.O (A)
W. R. N. S. STAFF OFFICERS
SUP'T W.R.N.S.
W.R.N.S. TYPISTS
BATH RM
W.R.N.S. SIGNALS OFFICERS
N.H.O CLERKS
N.H.O EMO
STAFF OFFR FIRE & A/G
W.R.N.S. & W.A.A.F. REST ROOM
GROUP GAS OFFICER R.A.F.
GROUP DEFENCE OFFR
R.N. SIG. & COM'N OFFR
RATINGS & AIRMEN
W.R.N.S. & W.A.A.F.
OFFICERS
W.R.N.S. CLERKS
ORG. 1.
ORG. 2.
LIFT
ORG MARINE
ENG MARINE
AIR SEA RESCUE LIAISON OFFR
ENG. EQUIP'T ENG ELEC
R.A.F. CLERKS
S.O.A. CLERKS
R.A.F. S.O.A
P.1 P2 & P3 OFFICERS
W.S.O & P.S.O
P.1.2.3. CLERKS
CENTRAL REGISTRY
SECRET REGISTRY
A. O. C.
PRIVATE APARTMENTS.
F85
F79
FIRST FLOOR PLAN.


LOWER GROUND FLOOR PLAN.
SER'GT R.M.
GUARD RM. Nº 1.
APPARATUS
APPARATUS EXTENSION
W.R.N.S. RTGS. (SLEEPING)
LAVATORY
W.A.A.F. RATINGS SLEEPING.
G.P.O. SWITCH ROOM.
BATTERY RM
DUTY CAPT SLEEPING
R.A.F. CNTLRS
A.C. SLEEP.
A. O. C.
C-in-C
C-in-C SLEEP.
FLAG LIEUT.
SEC'Y SLEEP.
LAVATORY
BATH RM
GUARD
FAN Rm
BOX RM.
PRINTING ROOM.
FAN CHAMBER
W.R.N.S. & W.A.A.F. OFFICERS SLEEPING.
LAV.
D1
D3
D4
D22
D23
LIFT
MET. OFFICER
SENIOR MET. OFFR
MET. T/P
S.A.S.O.
ARMAMENT GUNNERY & BOMBING LEADER OFFICERS
R.A.F. NAVIGTN OFFICER
G.P.O. L.O.
R.A.F. INTELLI. CLERKS
R.A.F. INTELL TACTICAL LIBRARY
MAPS.
GENERAL CLERKS.
SER'T R.M.
CUPBD.
CLOAK RM.
W.C.s.
R.A.F. SIGNS CLERKS
R.A.F. NAVIGTN OFFR
FLYING CONTROL ROOM
SENR FLYING CONTROL OFFICER
WING C'D'R TRAINING
WING C'D'R AIR
R.A.F. INTELLIGENCE



Left: **Another still taken during the filming in January 1945. (IWM)** *Right:* **When the Area Combined HQ was disbanded in August 1945, the basement was closed and most of the fixtures and fittings removed. Although the construction of Exchange Buildings was not finaly completed until the 1950s, by the 1980s it had became very run down and in December 1988 the Coal Board pension fund, which owned the building, put it up for auction. It was purchased by the Walton Commercial Group, a Liverpool-based property company led by chairman Bill Davies (former owner of Aintree Racecourse) for £4.75 million. The following year, Fred O'Brien, a local graphic designer, proposed that the Operations Room should be restored and opened in memory of its rôle in the Battle of the Atlantic, a campaign as then uncommemorated by any formal memorial.**

plenty of sea room in anticipation of the coming storm. Then he settled down to work with us, drinking pints of barley water, and his serenity amazed us. He seemed to have an uncanny prevision of what the enemy would do next, which came of course from his long experience of submarines.'

It would be tempting to view the exploit as a battle of wits between the opposing commanders — Max Horton and Karl Dönitz — but this would be a gross over-simplification in view of the thousands of people involved. Also, vitally important was the work of the crypto-analysts at Bletchley Park (see *After the Battle* No. 37), although their German opposite numbers had also cracked the early British codes.

The first six months of 1942 had seen the U-Boats wreaking havoc off the American coast which was still brightly lit, sinking over 200 ships, half of which were tankers, in what the U-Boat crews called their 'Happy Time'. However, the backlash came the following year when the Liberty ship building programme achieved a production rate of three ships per day — a rate far higher than Dönitz could achieve by sinkings.

In March 1943, the first of the very long range aircraft — the VLR Liberators — began operations to cover the 'air gap' which existed in mid-Atlantic beyond the range of conventional patrols. That same month, Bletchley Park managed to break the German cipher 'Shark' without the normal lengthy processing, enabling Horton's forces to act quickly and decisively. At the same time, the introduction of a new secure British code stopped Dönitz reading Admiralty radio traffic.

The climax of the battle came in May with the attack on Convoy ONS 5. For the sinking of 12 merchantmen, the Germans lost seven U-Boats including the U-954 in which Dönitz's son, Peter, was serving as a Leutnant. Whether his death finally brought home to Dönitz the fact that the scales had tipped against him is open to conjecture, but on May 24 he admitted defeat by ordering the wolf-packs to withdraw from the Atlantic.

By May 1945, U-Boat sinkings totalled 739 with the death of over 28,000 crewmen, while the Merchant Navies of the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa recorded the loss of 22,853 merchant seamen in over 2,500 ships sunk. Inevitably, the vast majority of the dead had no known grave but the sea, their memorials at Kiel and Tower Hill, London, standing as grim reminders of the death toll.

The battle won, Sir Max Horton expressed his gratitude to the staff of Western Approaches Command shortly before the headquarters was closed in August 1945:

'It has been our privilege to have lived in stirring times — vital years in the history of our country and our Empire. In 1940 we narrowly survived our greatest ordeal, and from that year onwards our strength and hopes began to rise. It was not, however, long after the fall of France that a cloud began to appear on our horizon which was to spread to such dimensions in the course of the next three years that the very existence of our country and the fortunes of the United Nations were again in jeopardy. I refer, of course, to the threat of unrestricted U-Boat warfare. The defeat of the U-Boats was a vital prelude to the unsurpassed victory over the Germans which we are celebrating today.

'Chief credit for that victory rightly goes to the fighting men in our escort vessels and aircraft and to the steadfastness of our Merchant Navy. Today, I particularly wish to thank and pay tribute to you who, year in, year out, by day and by night planned, organised, administered and directed this great battle, surely one worthy of recognition as one of the decisive

The project involved finding identical artefacts to recreate the scene as it had been during the war. *Left:* **January 1945.** *Above:* **Fred O'Brien, May 1993. The same doorway and wall ladder can be seen in the background. (IWM)**

The restoration was part of the overall £42 million refubishment programme for the whole of the Exchange Buildings complex, aided by a City Challenge grant from the government of £4.5 million. *Left:* **Unfortunately, the decision was taken to incoporate an operations table in the 'well' of the ops room, a feature which was never part of the original set-up.** *Right:* **Also small paper maps were introduced rather than the large painted wall maps which feature in all the wartime photographs. Here the Revd Benedict Webb, OSB, formerly Surgeon-Lieutenant with HMS *Hart*, a Bird-class sloop on convoy protection which suceeded in sinking five U-Boats, makes his first visit to Western Approaches. 'We always knew there was an operations centre somewhere controlling our movements,' he said. 'It is very moving to stand here now, fifty years later, and remember.'**

battles of the war. The U-Boats were fought on sea and from the air, and success in both elements could only be achieved by the closest co-operation between our two great Services.

'In Derby House we lived together, fed together and worked together; only by these means could we have achieved together the splendid co-ordination of effort on the sea and in the air which spelt the doom of the U-Boats. Quite rightly there was friendly rivalry between the two Services, but we never thought of measuring the relative contribution of each service in our united successes. It is, however, of academic interest, indeed I would say eloquent testimony of our combined effort, to note that of the many hundreds of U-Boats sunk, the numbers sunk by aircraft and by surface craft are almost exactly equal.

'This close co-operation could never have been achieved unless it had started from the top, and here I would like to thank Air Vice-Marshal Sir Leonard Slatter for his loyal co-operation and valuable advice to me personally on all questions appertaining to the air. His high standard of efficiency and friendship percolated through every branch of 15 Group, RAF.

'Two other Services, the WRNS and the WAAF, have been incorporated in the Western Approaches Headquarters. What a multitude of duties, hitherto considered only to be in the province of men, have been brilliantly performed by the officers and ratings of these two Services. The Navy and Air Force are justly proud and jealous of the high standard of efficiency of their "sister" Services.

'In dealing with the various departments of Western Approaches, I realise that Coastal Command has in each case their counterpart. I would therefore ask the RAF to consider that any remarks I make equally apply to their corresponding departments.

'The Western Approaches Command embraced the largest number of vessels ever assembled under one flag. As hunters of U-Boats our ships and aircraft gained renown, but this could never have been achieved had they not been cared for and kept in repair. I cannot adequately express to Engineer Admiral [Sir Henry] Wildish and his staff the extent of my gratitude for the manner in which they have performed their stupendous task. As with repairs, so with the adminstration of this vast fleet of ships and aircraft. Those concerned with the administration and secretarial duties have every reason to be proud of a job well done; a job which gets to the very core of the well-being and efficiency of the whole.

'The task of Western Approaches is finished. The curtain will soon be rung down and, when I survey this concourse in front of me, I feel that no words of mine can adequately express my gratitude. I say to all of you: "Hold your heads high by virtue of a double qualification — that of having served in the Navy or Air Force, and that of having taken a part in the Battle of the Atlantic." Goodbye — Thank you — The very best of good luck to you all.'

Several adjoining rooms in the basement and lower ground floor have also been opened, one of the nicest restorations being the Naval C-in-C's office *(left)* **overlooking the Operations Room. Compare this shot with the picture at the bottom of page 2.** *Right:* **And two hundred miles away stands another memorial — to the single fatality suffered in the ops room itself during the battle. In April 1943, a WAAF, ACW1 Patricia Lane, toppled from the tall map ladder, struck her head, and was killed. (Subsequent to the accident, the girls wore the parachute harness seen in the picture on page 2.) Today, Patricia's name can be found inscribed on the memorial panel at Charing Crematorium, Kent.**

TRAGINO 1941:
BRITAIN'S FIRST PARATROOP RAID

By Karel Margry

In June 1940, a suggestion reached the Air Ministry from a London engineering firm that a bombing raid on a certain aqueduct in southern Italy would pay a handsome dividend to the Allies, should the aqueduct be destroyed. The aqueduct formed part of an extensive pipeline system known as the Aquedotte Pugliese, which drew its supply from the River Sele and passed it through the Apennine mountains into south-east Italy. It carried the main water supply for the province of Apulia, inhabited by some two million Italians who live for the most part in Taranto, Brindisi, Bari, Foggia and other towns. To deprive them for a month at least of their regular water supply and compel them to fall back on local reservoirs would, it was hoped, create alarm and despondency and have a considerable effect on the morale of the Italians, who at that stage never dreamed that the war would involve any fighting on their soil.

The raid, it was thought, might even have an effect on the war in Albania. Taranto was an important naval base and Brindisi and Bari were embarking troops and stores to the Albanian theatre, and dislocation in these ports might prove of indirect help to the Greeks fighting there. (By the time the operation against the aqueduct was carried out in February 1941, fighting had extended to North Africa — Mussolini's forces had invaded Egypt in September and the first British counter-offensive was now pushing them back into Libya — and it was calculated that the raid would even have an effect on that theatre.)

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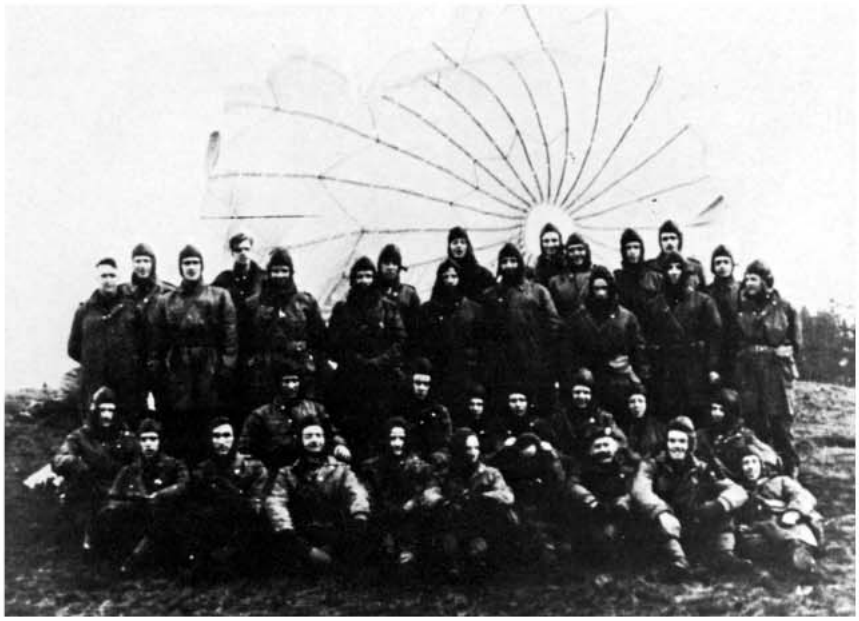
Top: **The target of Britain's first paratroop raid ever: the aqueduct across the Tragino creek, deep in the Apennine mountains of southern Italy. Situated across the valley of the Ofanto river from the hilltop town of Calitri, it carried the main water line from the headwaters of the River Sele eastwards to the coastal province of Apulia and the strategic ports of Taranto, Brindisi and Bari. At the time of the raid, February 1941, Britain's parachute arm was still in its infancy. The Central Landing School had only been opened at Ringway airport near Manchester in June 1940 with a dropping zone for parachutists being found at nearby Tatton Park. By the end of 1940, about 200 volunteers of what was by then known as 11th SAS (Special Air Service) had qualified as parachutists. It was from their number that a special 'X' Troop was selected for the raid on Tragino.** *Above:* **Today, a memorial in Tatton Park records the park's role in creating Britain's parachute arm.**



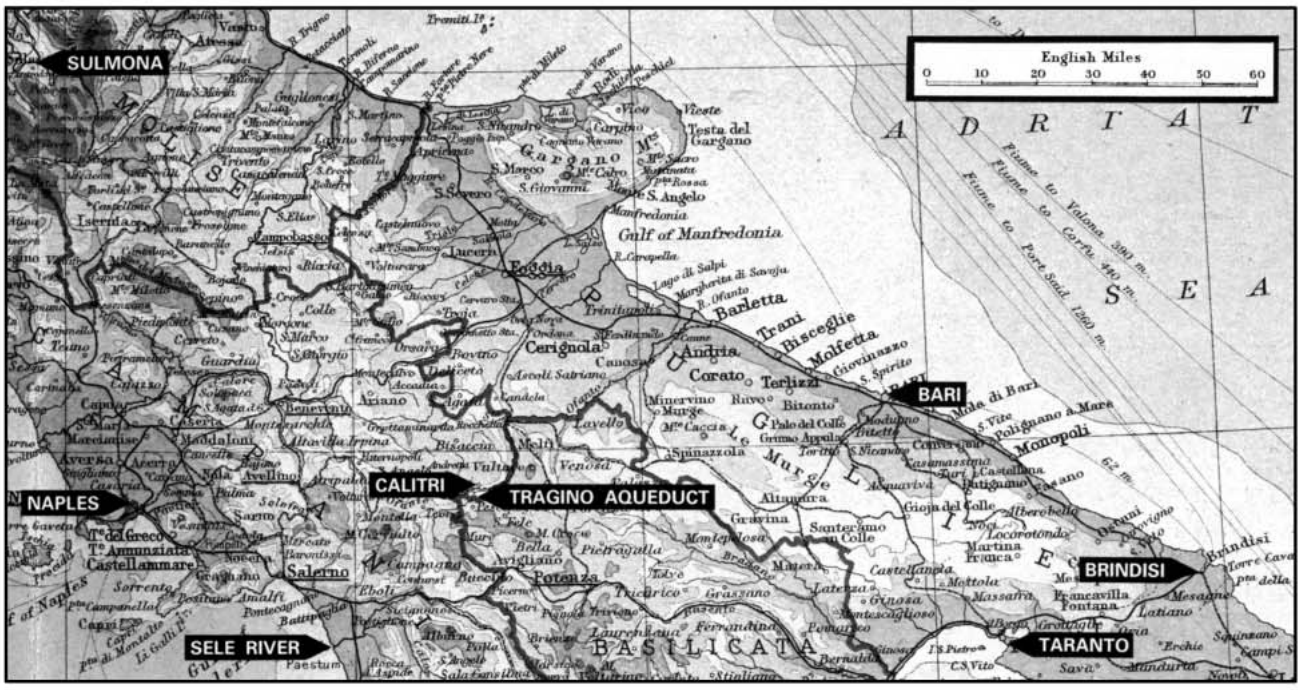
Left: **'The Guinea-Pigs' — a unique photo of 'X' Troop taken on the Tatton Park drop-zone during its six weeks of training for Operation 'Colossus'. Almost every account of the raid on Tragino states that 'X' Troop consisted of seven officers and 31 other ranks. However, none of these accounts made explicit whether this number included the two men attached as interpreters, nor mentioned that the original group included an officer and two other ranks who had been selected to stand by as reserves at Malta. In reality, 'X' Troop, including the reserves and attached interpreters, consisted of 39 men: eight officers and 31 other ranks. Of these, 35 actually jumped in the operation. (Courtesy of H. Pexton)** *Right:* **The commander of 'X' Troop was 30-year-old Major Trevor Pritchard, second-in-command of 11th SAS and known after his first three initials as 'Tag' Pritchard. This photo was taken in India before the war, when he was still serving with the Royal Welch Fusiliers.**

The aqueduct in question lay in the heart of the Apennine mountains in the province of Campania, south-west of the 4,000-foot peak of Monte Vulture and just south of the small hilltop town of Calitri. It crossed a small stream, the Tragino, a tributary of the River Ofanto which flowed eastward in the valley between the aqueduct and Calitri.

On December 5, 1940, a meeting was held at the Air Ministry at which the Planning Staff decided the target to be an important one, but not suitable for a bombing attack. It was therefore referred to the Director of Combined Operations for urgent consideration. As a result of further deliberations, a decision to use airborne troops was arrived at and on January 11, 1941, Operation 'Colossus' was officially approved.

The plan was that a party of officers and men from the newly-created parachute arm should be transported to Malta by air, and the operation launched from there. The paratroop force would be carried and dropped by six bombers. Two more bombers, also from Malta, were to carry out a diversionary bombing attack on the railway yards at Foggia. It was hoped that the Italians would believe that these yards were the target for the whole force. After blowing up the aqueduct, the force was to make its way on foot to the west coast of Italy where they would be taken off by submarine.

This was to be the first airborne operation ever mounted by the British army. In fact, it is almost certain that the official reason for the operation — the strategic importance of the Tragino aqueduct for the war in Albania and North Africa — was in reality nothing but an excuse for what, in fact, was to be an experiment. Were British parachute troops capable of carrying out a mission in enemy territory? Was their equipment satisfactory? Could the RAF take them to the right spot and arrive at the right time? These were some of the questions to which, it was hoped, the raid would supply the answers. Other reasons for the raid, not to be overlooked, were more of a propagandistic nature. At home, the creation of a parachute arm was still controversial and its advocates were anxious to vindicate its existence. Abroad, the raid would announce to the world that Britain had parachute troops and, even at its lowest ebb, was still capable of aggressive action.



Half of 'X' Troop consisted of engineers, the other half of infantry. *Right:* **Captain Christopher Lea commanded one of the three infantry sections. (Courtesy of C. R. Lea)** *Far right:* **Lieutenant Tony Deane-Drummond commanded another section. On January 24, he was sent to Malta, the take-off base for the operation, ahead of the rest of 'X' Troop to make preparations there. The third infantry section was commanded by 2nd Lieutenant Geoffrey Jowett.**

'X' TROOP

Britain's parachute arm had by then been in existence for only seven months. On June 22, 1940, Churchill, had given instructions to his Chief-of-Staff, General Ismay, for the training of 'a corps of at least 5,000 parachute troops.' Major John Rock, RE, was given charge of the military organisation; and shortly afterwards the Central Landing School (renamed Central Landing Establishment in September) was formed at Ringway, the civil airport of Manchester, under the command of an RAF officer, Group Captain L.G. Harvey, to train men for this new type of warfare. With a combined RAF and Army staff, it was the RAF's task to produce the parachute equipment, to evolve the methods of dropping, and to teach the troops their air technique, while the Army studied the special organisation for fighting on the ground and the weapons and tactical training. The first months of the CLE were difficult. Co-operation from the War Office was found wanting and the Air Ministry was obstructive and clearly opposed to the new arm. Six old Whitley Mark I aircraft was all that was made available for parachute training. However, Major Rock found ready co-operation among his RAF colleagues, chief among them Wing Commanders Louis Strange, Nigel Norman and Maurice Newnham.

The troops that formed the first pupil parachutists were men of No. 2 Commando. All officers and other ranks were volunteers. All through the summer and autumn, rigorous training went on. Four weeks of intensive physical training, were followed by real parachuting at Tatton Park near Knutsford, CLE's drop-zone some six miles south-west of Ringway. After that, the men moved to Scotland for six weeks of training and mountaineering at the Commando School. Now very fit and keen for action, the next five months came as a definite anti-climax, as they relapsed into routine training and no one appeared to know how, or when, they were going to be used. Soon, the men were showing signs of boredom. Tired of waiting, of showing off before generals and cabinet ministers, while there was fighting in North Africa, men began to ask to return to unit. In November, No. 2 Commando was renamed the 11th Special Air Service Battalion. By now, some 200 of its men had qualified as parachutists.

Then, in early January, a sudden whisper went round the camp. Something was about to happen. All at once, the requests for transfer stopped. The commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Jackson, assembled the battalion at Cliffe House in Knutsford and informed them that a top-secret operation involving deep penetration into enemy territory was planned. He added that it was unlikely that any arrangements would be made for the 'extraction' of the 'survivors' and that, though those taking part would be wearing uniform, the enemy might well regard them as spies and treat them as such. He ended by calling for volunteers. Every officer and man of the 500 on parade stepped forward. To solve the problem, the CO asked the officers, chosen to take part, to each select five good men to go on the operation. Half were to belong to the Royal Engineers and half were to form a covering party during the demolition.

The chosen few were formed into a special unit, called 'X' Troop. Its commander was

'X' Troop included three men who could speak Italian. One was a regular member of 11th SAS: Private Nicol Nastri *(below left)*. **To protect his Italian background, he went on the operation under the more British-sounding name of 'John Tristan'. The two other interpreters had been attached especially for the operation. Right from the moment he joined them, the men of 'X' Troop looked upon Flight Lieutenant Ralph Lucky, RAF, as the 'mystery man' of the operation. They suspected that there was more to him than just being an attached interpreter. Even some of the officers thought that his inclusion was perhaps an attempt to get an agent into Italy. Before take-off for Malta, they noticed that he was on uncommonly friendly terms with Admiral Keyes, the Chief of Combined Operations; later, in Italian captivity, he would still act independently from the rest, seeking contacts with the Italians and securing privileges, as if he was planning a thing of his own. However, all these suspicions were unfounded. Prompted by the suppositions of the 'X' Troop veterans, we enquired with the SOE archives. The SOE Advisor of the Foreign Office replied to us that he had established that Lucky never had any connections with Special Operations whatsoever. 'X' Troop's third interpreter was an unlikely soldier if ever there was one: Fortunato Picchi** *(below right)* **was 42 years old and had been head waiter at the London Savoy. A naturalised Briton and avowed anti-fascist, he had given up his job and volunteered for duty in the British armed forces. It was while researching Lucky's background that we unexpectedly discovered that there had been an SOE man on the operation after all: Picchi. Recruited at the end of 1940, he was the first Italian to volunteer to return to Italy with SOE. His SOE report described him as 'non-politically minded, but anti-fascist. An idealist, an excellent worker and organiser who cannot allow failure. Wants above all things for everyone to be treated fairly. Is prepared to shine in all England's trials and has no desire to be treated in any way differently from an English soldier'. There was a query about his fitness, in view of his hotel background and age, but he was found to be 'quite fit and moderate in his habits'. Asked by Combined Operations on January 2, 1941, to supply two Italians for Operation 'Colossus', SOE in fact provided three for parachute training, but as planning for the raid evolved, it was decided to take only one. To protect his identity, Picchi was given the alias of a Free Frenchman, '3846154 Private Pierre Dupont'.**

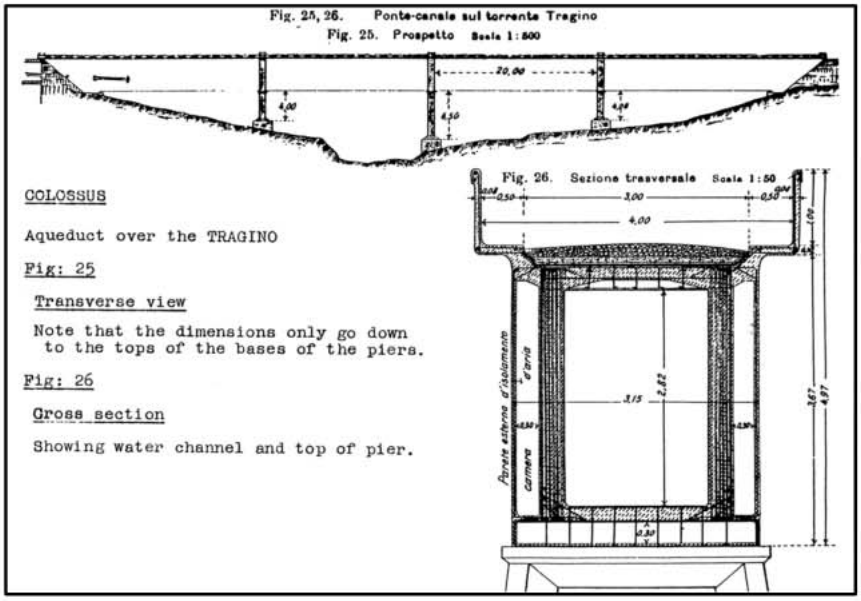


Fig. 25, 26. Ponte-canale sul torrente Tragino
Fig. 25. Prospetto Scala 1:500
Fig. 26. Sezione trasversale Scala 1:50
COLOSSUS
Aqueduct over the TRAGINO
Fig: 25
Transverse view
Note that the dimensions only go down to the tops of the bases of the piers.
Fig: 26
Cross section
Showing water channel and top of pier.

The Tragino aqueduct had first been suggested as a target to the British military authorities by the London engineering firm which had helped to build it in the late 1920s. However, in spite of this, exact information on the aqueduct and its construction was very scarce. These drawings came from an Italian engineering magazine. (Air Historical Branch)

Major T.A.G. Pritchard, 11th SAS' second-in-command. The engineer detail was under the command of Captain Gerry Daly with 2nd Lieutenant George Paterson as his assistant. The covering party would consist of three sections, led by Captain Christopher Lea, Lieutenant Anthony Deane-Drummond, and 2nd Lieutenant Arthur Jowett respectively.

Three interpreters were included. One, Private Nicol Nastri, of Italian background but a true Cockney, was an organic member of 11th SAS, but the other two were attached especially for the mission. Both were middle-aged men: one was an RAF officer, Flight Lieutenant Ralph Lucky of No. 311 Squadron; the other an Italian called Fortunato Picchi. Picchi was perhaps the most surprising member of 'X' Troop. Aged 42, in civilian life he had been head waiter at the banquet hall of the London Savoy Hotel. He had been interned as an alien at the beginning of the war. An avowed anti-Fascist, he had joined the Free Italians and volunteered for any job the British government might give him. To protect them from being regarded as traitors in case of capture, the two native Italians were given new identities: Nastri became Private 'John Tristan' and Picchi 'Private Pierre Dupont'.

As finally selected, 'X' Troop counted eight officers and 31 other ranks; seven officers and 29 men were scheduled to drop in the actual operation. One officer and two other ranks were held in reserve as replacements.

Moving from their billets at Knutsford to a special accommodation at Ringway itself, 'X' Troop immediately started a rigorous training programme. It lasted six weeks. Each morning, before breakfast, the men had a three-mile run, followed by thirty minutes P.T. After breakfast, they had a 15-mile march with full kit. During the day, they had aircraft or container drill, gun practice or lectures on withdrawal and escape. At night, they practised night drops.

A full-scale wooden mock-up of that part of the aqueduct to be attacked was erected in Tatton Park behind Tatton Hall, the country seat of Lord Egerton. Here the troops spent the afternoons and evenings training the attack and practising the demolition routine. Plans called for about half a ton of explosives to be placed against the aqueduct piers. In time, the engineers became so efficient that they could do it in just over half an hour.

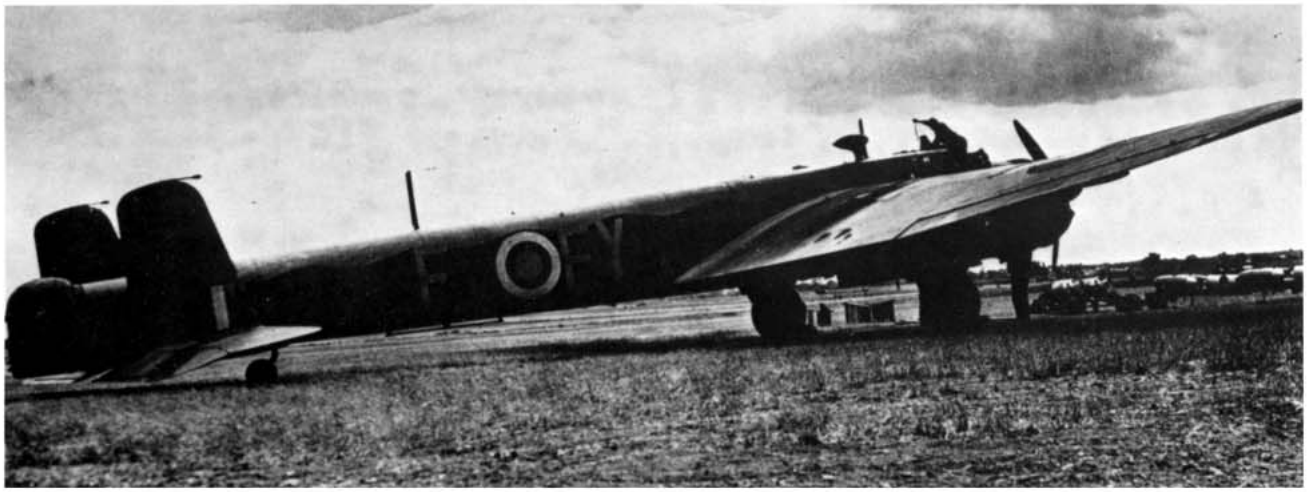
Meanwhile, preparations were in progress for the air side of the operation. Wing Commander Sir Nigel Norman was made Operation Controller. The Air Ministry had originally decided to use Bombays for the raid, but after urgent representation by the Central Landing Establishment, this was changed and eight of the latest Whitleys were made available. On January 15, eight Whitley V aircraft and crews belonging to Nos. 51 and 78 Squadrons arrived from RAF Dishford. Wing Commander J.B. ('Willie') Tait, DFC, was made the Attack Commander Air. In the brief time left before the operation, long-distance tanks and container release gear for the arms and explosive containers had to be fitted; also, training had to be given to the aircrews who came from bomber operations and had no experience in parachute dropping. A landscape model of the aqueduct and its surroundings was produced and used in planning the attack and training the aircrews. The model had been made by an RAF officer on the CLE staff, Mac Monnies, and was kept strictly out of bounds to all but a few in Group Captain Harvey's office.

Lieutenant Deane-Drummond had been chosen to travel to Malta by RAAF Sunderland flying boat in advance of the main party. He was to organise the arrangements for the raid there and carry the operation orders to Malta's Army, Navy and Air Force chiefs. He left Ringway for the Sunderland base at Plymouth on January 24, but due to the weather, he had to wait seven days before he could finally take off. Stopping overnight at Gibraltar, he finally arrived in Malta at dusk of February 1, eight days ahead of the main force.

That same day, back in Britain, a dress rehearsal was staged with 'X' Troop 'hole-jumping' on the mock-up aqueduct in Tatton Park from the Whitleys. The exercise was a blatant fiasco. A cloudy night and a strong wind combined to make the dropping inaccurate. About half the aircraft dropped their loads in the wrong place, several men landing in high trees where they remained suspended by their parachutes until freed by the Knutsford Fire Brigade. Those that did land

Only one picture was available to the planners of the raid and this was in fact 13 years old, having been taken in 1928 when the aqueduct was being built. The huts in the foreground used by the construction team were no longer there at the time of the raid. (Airborne Forces Museum)

The same view today, looking north-west, with the town of Calitri just visible on the side of the mountain in the distance on the right.



The eight Whitley Mark V bombers needed for Operation 'Colossus' came from Nos. 51 and 78 Squadrons from RAF Dishford. Wing Commander 'Willie' Tait, DFC, commanded the composite flight which was detached from bombing duties especially for the raid. This plane, 'E' for Edward, originated from No. 78 Squadron. It was flown by Pilot Officer Robinson, with Sergeant Hatcher as second pilot, Sergeant Nolan as navigator, Sergeant Diamond as wireless operator and Sergeant Gurmin as air gunner. During the actual operation, it in addition carried Wing Commander Nigel Norman, the observer for the Central Landing Establishment (CLE), and successfully dropped 2nd Lieutenant Paterson and his stick of five engineers on the target. (Courtesy of E. Gurmin)

correctly were dragged by their parachutes on landing, or had to chase their containers which were bowling along over the ground.

On February 2, the Whitleys flew to RAF Mildenhall in Suffolk, the take-off base for the operation, followed on the 4th by 'X' Troop in a special bus. Here the men were taught a correspondence code to be used in case they were captured.

By February 7, all was ready. Admiral Sir Roger Keyes, Chief of Combined Operations, came to see 'X' Troop off. They all paraded in a hangar together with the aircrew and some of the Whitleys. He spoke to everyone and ended with a short talk, saying: 'I know that you will tackle this job with determination and enthusiasm, and with a bit of luck I am sure you will pull it off. We shall be waiting to hear how you have got on, waiting to learn what British paratroopers can do. I decided that I just couldn't let you go without coming here to say goodbye to you.' He then drew himself up and saluted *them.* As he turned away, one trooper heard him whisper to himself: 'A pity, a damned pity.' Perhaps better than anyone else, Keyes knew that the chances of 'X' Troop getting back were very small indeed.

The eight planes left Mildenhall at 10.00 p.m. After a night flight of nearly 1,400 miles, much of it over occupied France, they arrived safely at Malta at 9.00 a.m. the following morning, landing at RAF Luqa. Deane-Drummond had arranged for accommodation at the old naval hospital of Lazaretto on Manuel Island. He had also drawn up the explosives and other stores needed for the operation.

On the 9th, all containers were repacked and repairs were carried out to aircraft damaged by flying rock from enemy bombing. The Governor of Malta, General Dobbie, visited the party. That same morning, Flying Officer A. Warburton, DSO, DFC (one of the pioneers of British photographic reconnaissance), flying a Glen Martin at 24,000 feet, obtained not only photographs of the target area, but a complete strip from the target to the coast. Hitherto there had been no up-to-date photographs of the aqueduct, the only available picture being a photo which showed the aqueduct under construction around 1928. Examination of the photographs showed, outlined clearly against the snow-covered ground, that there were not one but *two* aqueducts, of unequal size and about 250 yards apart. It was decided that the larger, eastern one would be the objective. The dropping area appeared suitable, without signs of defensive measures.

Meanwhile, arrangements were being made to bring back 'X' Troop after they had accomplished their task. The Admiralty ordered submarine HMS *Triumph* to be lying off the mouth of the River Sele — south of Salerno — on the night of February 15/16. Since the operation was due to take place on the 10th/11th, this would give the parachute troops five days to reach the rendezvous on foot. This seemed feasible, for, although the country was mountainous, the distance to be traversed was not more than 60 miles. If no one showed up on the arranged night, the submarine would return a second time three nights later, on the night of the 17th/18th. This would be the last rendezvous. Major Pritchard conferred with the commander of HMS *Triumph,* Lieutenant Commander W. J. W. Woods, in person to co-ordinate plans.

Final briefing for the operation took place at 4.00 p.m. on the 10th. For the first time,

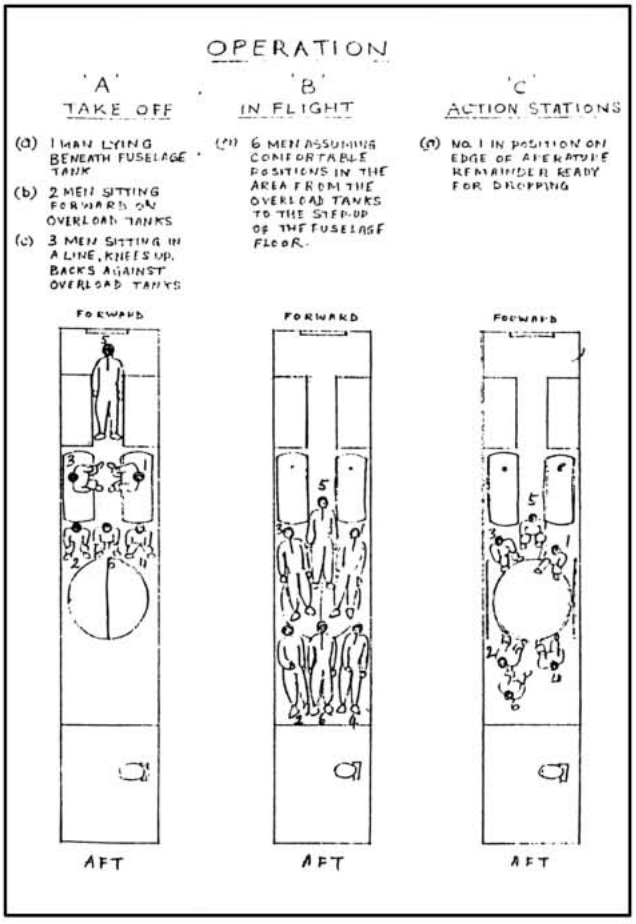
Take-off base for the operation was RAF Luqa on Malta. As Lieutenant Deane-Drummond, together with an RAF maintenance crew of six men, had already been sent ahead to Malta by Sunderland to organise billets, the eight bombers carried 40 men on the flight from the UK to Malta: 35 of the 36 men scheduled to take part; the three reserves (2nd Lieutenant Davies, Corporal Rowe and Private Humphries — not to be confused with Private Humphrey who did take part); Wing Commander Norman; and Corporal Gray (an RAF fitter). Flight Lieutenant Bruce Williams of the CLE, in charge of parachutes, flew as part of one of the Whitley crews. At dawn on February 8, all eight Whitleys arrived in Malta, much to the surprise of the RAF who had expected one or two to fall by the wayside as had always happened on previous flights to the island. They had flown the 1,400 miles from England with a following wind and in a record time of 11 hours. *Above:* **At RAF Luqa, Flight Lieutenant Walter Williams (second from left), pilot of 'W' for Willie, poses with his crew in front of their aircraft. (Airborne Forces Museum)**

Pritchard briefed all ranks on the actual object and the hoped-for result of the operation. Up till this point, everybody had thought they were going to go to Abyssinia, and the men cheered when they heard that it was going to be Italy itself. As yet, only the officers were told the details of the pick-up plan. The troop was to split up into several parties and rendezvous at the same spot on the coast five days later. Light signals were arranged for bringing the submarine in, but routes would be left for the individual parties to work out for themselves.

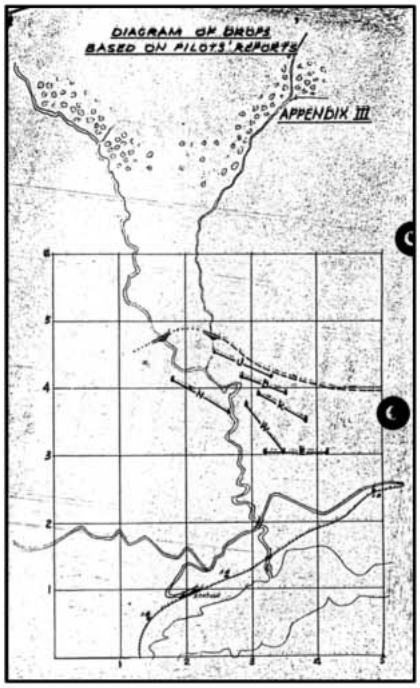
Each of the six troop-carrying Whitleys would carry six men and four to six containers, the latter containing arms (either a Bren gun or three or four Thompson sub-machine guns), explosives, folding ladders, other equipment and food. In addition, each of the six planes would carry a 250lb bomb. The two supporting bombers would each have two 500lb and six 250lb bombs. The time schedule was for aircraft No. 1 to drop at 9.30 p.m., with other planes arriving at six minutes intervals. After the parachute drop, the six planes were to continue to Foggia and join in the diversion.

At 5.00 p.m., after some hot tea and hard-boiled eggs, the men put on their parachutes and took a truck to the waiting aeroplanes, singing their own special song, the refrain of which was 'Oh! What a surprise for the Duce, the Duce!' Before emplaning, Pritchard addressed the men on the runway. 'You are pioneers', he said, 'or guinea-pigs — and you can choose which word you prefer'. In high spirits, the men squeezed down the tunnel of the Whitleys.

In retrospect, intelligence for the Tragino raid can only be called haphazard. It was only on Malta on the evening of February 8, less than a day before the raid was due, that it was discovered from aerial photographs taken that day that there were not one but two aqueducts spanning the Tragino valley. After careful study, it was decided that the larger, eastern one was the one to be attacked. Our photo, taken from the hillside to the west, shows both aqueducts, 200 yards apart and with the larger one in the background.


OPERATION
'A'
TAKE OFF
(a) 1 MAN LYING BENEATH FUSELAGE TANK
(b) 2 MEN SITTING FORWARD ON OVERLOAD TANKS
(c) 3 MEN SITTING IN A LINE, KNEES UP, BACKS AGAINST OVERLOAD TANKS
'B'
IN FLIGHT
(a) 6 MEN ASSUMING CONFORTABLE POSITIONS IN THE AREA FROM THE OVERLOAD TANKS TO THE STEP-UP OF THE FUSELAGE FLOOR.
'C'
ACTION STATIONS
(a) NO. 1 IN POSITION ON EDGE OF APERATURE REMAINDER READY FOR DROPPING
FORWARD
FORWARD
FORWARD
AFT
AFT
AFT

Left: **2nd Lieutenant George Paterson was the assistant engineer officer of 'X' Troop, the chief engineer officer being Captain Gerry Daly. Little did Paterson suspect, as he had his snapshot taken in front of one of the Whitleys on Malta, that, on the actual operation, Daly's stick would not be dropped in the right place and that the responsibility for the demolition of the aqueduct would come to rest solely on his shoulders. (Courtesy of G. R. Paterson)** *Right:* **The planning for the operation gave precise instructions how the sticks of six men were to divide in the fuselage of the Whitleys during take-off, during the three-hour flight to the target and at 'action stations' respectively. As the plane carrying Captain Daly and five other engineers was about to take off, one of the men, a corporal, suddenly reported feeling sick. Not wanting a sick man on the operation, Daly ordered him off the plane. It was probably the last-minute nature of the drop-out which precluded any of the three reserves taking his place.**



Left: **The diagram of the five sticks that were dropped correctly, based on the pilots reports. The letters correspond with the plane letters. It shows that the first plane to arrive, 'N' for Nuts, dropped its stick on the far side of the Tragino stream.** *Above:* **The DZ was a sloping piece of open ground, rising to a high point called Hill 427. This is how it appears from the ground today, looking up the slope.**

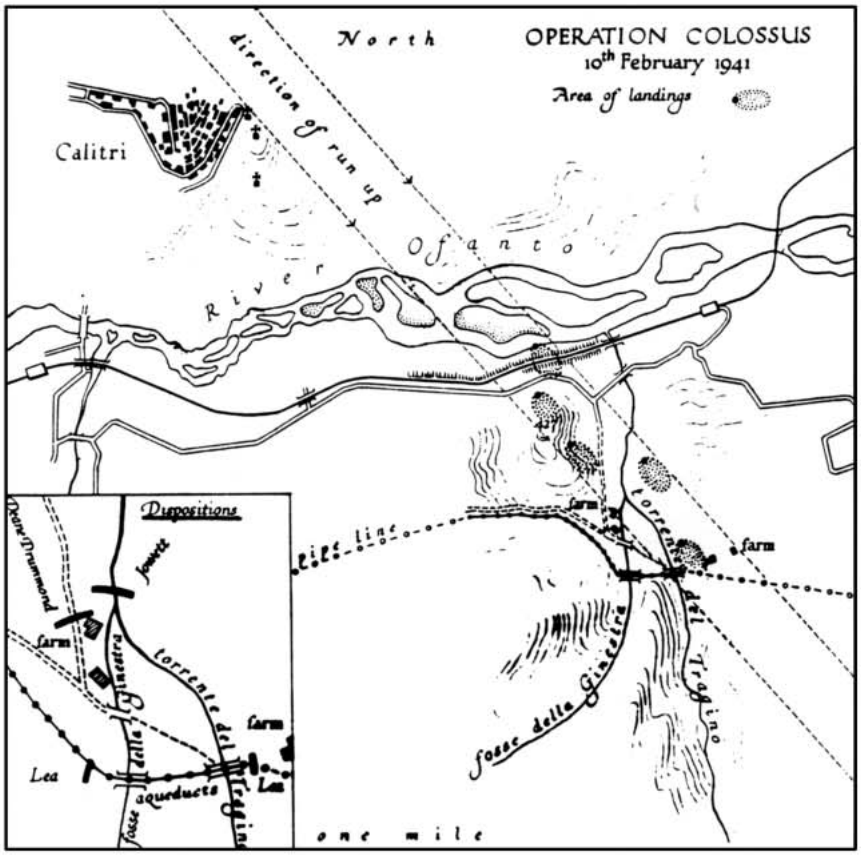
THE RAID

The first three aircraft, carrying the covering party, took off at 5.40 p.m. Ten minutes later the diversion flight of two aircraft left to attack Foggia. At 6.04 p.m., two of the three planes carrying the RE demolition party took off on time. The third aircraft, 'J' for Johnnie, with Captain Daly's stick on board, was supposed to lead the three RE planes and take off at 6.00 p.m., but was held up when one of his stick reported feeling sick at the last-minute. Daly ordered the man, a corporal, to leave the plane and it took off late, at 6.17 p.m., with only five paratroopers aboard.

The flight was uneventful except for slight flak over Sicily. The weather was excellent and visibility extremely good. The aircraft crossed the Italian coast at 10,000 feet in a clear sky and, when the target was reached, the aqueduct was easily seen standing out sharply in the bright moonlight against the snow-capped ridges of the desolate Apennines.

The first plane to reach the dropping zone was aircraft No. 3, 'N' for Nuts, piloted by Sergeant Lashbrook and carrying Deane-Drummond's stick. After the '15 minutes to target' early warning call, the men had made ready to jump, but nothing happened until suddenly the rear gunner (he was in fact Flight Lieutenant Bruce Williams of the CLE who was accompanying the raid as an observer) came through from the tail shouting 'You are to drop in under a minute. Get cracking'. The intercom had failed at the last minute and for about ten seconds there was a pandemonium while the men wrestled with the exit doors in the floor. As the plane passed over the village of Calitri at 100 feet, the red light came on and, five seconds later, the green light. It was 9.42 p.m. The six men dropped through the hole, the containers — one with a Bren gun, one with four tommy-guns and two with explosive charges — being released between Nos. 3 and 4. The stick had been dropped rather low, from about 400 feet, which gave them some 15 seconds before touch-down. As he descended, Deane-Drummond saw the aqueduct, the mountains and the streams, exactly as he remembered them from the scale model, standing out clearly in the full moon. The lieutenant landed in a ploughed field on the side of a hill, across the Tragino stream from the planned DZ, but only about a 100 yards above the aqueduct.

Four of his men had landed nearby. Using the arranged password 'Heil Hitler!' and the reply 'Viva Duce!', they quickly assembled. The tommy-gun canister was also only a few yards away and this was quickly opened. However, one man was missing: unknown to his comrades, Lance-Corporal Harry Boulter had crashed onto large boulders at the side of the Tragino and broken his ankle.



A map of the area drawn up by the Air Historical Branch in December 1942 with the notation that 'The point of aim for the parachutists was Hill 427. They came down in a good "pattern". The spot in each landing area marks the point of landing of the first man down from each aircraft.' Note the slight variation in drop pattern compared with the earlier diagram. The inset shows the defensive positions taken up by the infantry sections of Deane-Drummond, Jowett and Lea. (Air Historical Branch)

Not losing any time, Deane-Drummond ordered his section to divide into two parties. One, which included Picchi, was to clear some farm shacks just above where they had landed; the other, led by Sergeant Arthur Lawley, to clear the cottages on the other side of the Tragino some 150 yards from the aqueduct. All inhabitants were to be rounded up. The lieutenant himself would be at the aqueduct and all inhabitants found were to be brought there. As the men went their way, they looked at the sky uneasily. So far, none of the other planes had shown up.

Sergeant Lawley's party was just approaching the cottages, when a door opened and a man came out with a dog. Flattening themselves, the men saw him go into an outbuilding, then, after a few minutes, re-enter the house. They followed him, kicked the door open, and surprised a peasant family — two men, a woman and several children. By lowering his gun and holding out his hand, Lawley indicated that he wished no harm, and the family allowed themselves to be shepherded outside. With the family in the second house was an Italian soldier in uniform who, when Lawley stepped forward to shake hands with the elderly man, made a dive for a shot-gun standing against the wall. Lawley beat him to it and, although he spoke no Italian, his tone of voice and raised gun, left no doubt that he meant business if the soldier tried one more trick.

Altogether, the two parties collected some two dozen Italians, men, women and children, all civilians except for the one soldier. Docilely, they allowed themselves to be marched off to the aqueduct which Deane-Drummond, to his relief, had found unguarded.

It was now around 10.00 p.m. All the while, nothing had been heard of the other planes. It was difficult not to imagine that perhaps they had all lost their way and theirs was the only one to arrive.Deane-Drummond had dropped at 9.42 p.m., but it was not until about 10.15 that the buzzing of other planes was heard. When the flak opened up over Sicily, the other four aircraft had taken evasive action and flown off course for a time, resulting in a late arrival.

Down below, Deane-Drummond and his five men cheered inwardly as, one after the other, the planes came roaring in low, and the silver-white parachutes floated down peacefully in the cold moonlit night. Their Italian prisoners looked up too, awed by a spectacle they would never forget, with the children excitedly crying 'Angeli!, Angeli!'

Aircraft No. 1, 'K' for King, piloted by Wing Commander Tait, carried Pritchard, Lea, Lucky and three others. The jump itself went like clockwork, the major himself jumping first. Pritchard had wanted to land ahead of his men and it was a disappointment that his plane was in fact one of the last to come in. His stick also landed further away from the objective than any of the others, setting down almost a mile from it, near the River Ofanto. Pritchard himself actually landed on the pebbles at the side of the water. One of his stick, Lance-Corporal Harry Pexton, landed in a 14-foot tree and only after considerable time managed to reach a branch and cut himself free. His stick together, Pritchard quickly set about retrieving his containers. One of the arms containers — with three Thompsons — had failed to drop, but, armed with the three guns from the second arms container and carrying the food canister and the ladder, the party set off towards the aqueduct, leaving only the heavy 40lb boxes of gun-cotton to be fetched later.

Circling around, Tait controlled the dropping of the other planes by W/T. Aircraft No. 2, 'W' for Willie, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Williams, carried Lieutenant Jowett's stick. First to drop was Sergeant Percy Clements. Sitting on the rim of the hole, Clements saw the green light flick on, then, as the plane rose steeply to evade a steep escarpment, revert to red; it went on and off and on again; Clements launched himself forward, only to be grabbed and held by two of his comrades, as the green light changed to red again and the pilot circled to make a fresh approach. For a interminable five minutes, Clements dangled out of the hole, half in and half out of the plane, while his comrades grimly held on to him. At last, there was a clear green signal and they could let him go. Here again, one tommy-gun container failed to come off.

The farm buildings near the aqueduct. The inhabitants of these were quickly rounded up by the parachutists, and the dozen or so male prisoners were put to work collecting containers and hauling the explosives from the DZ to the aqueduct. It was during this labour that one of the elder peasants suddenly exclaimed in a broad American accent: 'Are you guys English?' Quick as a flash, one of the troopers, a Cockney, retorted: 'No chum, we are Abyssinians on our way to Sunday School'. It turned out that the old man had been a bell hop at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York for several years.

Aircraft No. 5, 'E' for Edward, flown by Pilot Officer Robinson and with Wing Commander Norman on board as observer, carried Lieutenant Paterson and five of his sappers. After three men had jumped, Paterson pressed the container release button. Nothing seemed to happen. Quickly despatching the other two men, he pressed the button again, but still the containers seemed to jam. He banged at it, but apparently without use. Time was up and he jumped, cursing the container release mechanism. (The aircraft mission report shows that all six containers, five loaded with explosives and one with a ladder, did in fact come off on the fifth run over the DZ.) Paterson made a good landing in fairly deep mud. Lance-Corporal Doug Jones just missed a row of trees — only to land with a great splash in the middle of the Tragino stream. Wading and crawling, with the sodden chute a clinging weight on his shoulder, he made it to the bank.

Aircraft No. 6, 'D' for Don, skippered by Sergeant Holden, carried Sergeant Edward Durie and five other sappers and all made a good jump. All containers, five with explosives and one with a ladder, came off without problem. They caught up with one of the parachutists, but that did not affect that man's safe landing. By 10.45 p.m., five of the six aircraft had dropped their loads and were clear of the area.

The demolition of the aqueduct was hampered by two unwelcome surprises: first, Lieutenant Paterson discovered that the aqueduct's piers were not of brick as they had been led to expect, but of concrete; then, with some containers missing and others impossible to find, it became clear that the amount of explosive available was much smaller than anticipated: only 800lb instead of the expected 2,240lb.

As planned for the drop, the explosives for blowing up the aqueduct included 2,240lb of wet slabs of gun cotton in 160 boxes; 5 Cordtex drums, 111 primers, 36 detonators and 162 feet of safety fuse. The demolition equipment also included 40 charge boards, cordage, sheepshank and hooks (to be used for hanging the charges around the piers); 20 angle plates; 5 cable strops with tensioners; 5 pairs of ladders; 10 50-feet alpine strops; 10 windlass sticks; and one ball each of kite cord and spun yarn. For tools they had 5 hammers, 10 chisels, 5 entrenching tools and 5 handsaws. All this, except the detonators which the men carried in their pockets, was put in 25 containers. Of these, five failed to come off the planes and several others could not be found. Forced to improvise, Paterson and his team of sappers attached 640lb of explosives to the westernmost pier and 160lb to the adjoining abutment and this sufficed to bring the bridge down. When the pier went up, the aqueduct broke in half, and water gushed out from two sides.

However, there was no sign of aircraft No. 4. After its delayed start, 'J' for Johnnie made a bad landfall in Italy and proceeded to follow the wrong river, searching in vain for the aqueduct, until it arrived at the Adriatic. The pilot, 2nd Lieutenant Hood, returned, finally located the dropping area around 11.15 p.m., one-and-a-half hours late, and then dropped Daly and his men two miles to the north-east in the next valley, too far away to be of any use. Furthermore, none of the plane's containers, five of which contained charges and one a ladder, came off. All this was a serious blow, for Daly was the senior RE officer responsible for setting the explosives, and the explosive charges could ill be missed.

Meanwhile, around the aqueduct, the other sticks were assembling. Moving to the objective, some men found Corporal Boulter, dragging himself painfully towards the bridge. They helped him to a grassy slope and, following orders, left him to his own devices while the raid got under way. When Pritchard arrived at the aqueduct, Deane-Drummond reported that he had found it unguarded and that he had rounded up all Italian civilians in the vicinity. He also reported the news that Captain Daly was missing.

As more men arrived, the covering party took up defensive positions. Lea's section held either side of the aqueduct; Jowett's section was across the Tragino, holding the sloping ground where Deane-Drummond had landed; Deane-Drummond's section was on the track from the cottages to the aqueduct.

Pritchard ordered the sappers to collect the containers. They were fairly widely scattered and the lights on some of them had gone out. Pritchard soon realised that carrying up all the explosives would clearly exhaust the men and take up far too much time, so he decided to use the dozen or so male Italian prisoners. The peasants had by then been locked inside one of the cottages. When the interpreters put the order to them, they commented that they would be very willing to oblige, for nothing ever happened in that part of the world and they would now have enough to talk about for the rest of their lives. Docile and obedient, they trudged off and began to comb the fields and hillsides under the watchful eyes of the British skymen. The hard work soon made them grumble and curse. (Ironically, most of these Italian civilians were later awarded medals for their 'gallant behaviour in the face of the enemy'!)

The only other sound in the night air was the barking of farm dogs. Suddenly, the infantry guards pricked up their ears. From the direction of Calitri came a lone figure on a bicycle, pedalling down the track to the farm buildings. Deane-Drummond pounced on him and took him in charge. He turned out to be the local station-master, whose main worry upon capture was that he would lose his job for being absent from his station. But after Deane-Drummond had earnestly promised him a note explaining the reason for his absence, the man contentedly joined his compatriots in carrying the boxes.

In the absence of Daly, Pritchard ordered Paterson and such sappers as were available to carry out the demolition. Seeing the real thing for the first time, Paterson made a quick survey of the aqueduct. It was much the same as the models he had studied at Ringway — except that the centre pier was not at all low and squat as the models had suggested, but all of 30 foot high and with its feet resting in the centre of the water. However, that was not his only worry. From the details supplied by the London engineering firm, they had been led to believe that the aqueduct was made of brick, but ever since he had seen the air photographs at Malta, Paterson had feared that the piers might be of a sterner stuff. Taking a chisel and hammer, he broke the surface of one of the piers. It was reinforced concrete.

To make matters worse, with the five explosives containers missing with Daly's plane, the amount of explosive available was considerably smaller than had been planned. Also, not all of the 15 explosives containers that had come down could be found and, so far, only 800lb of the expected 2,240lb had been recovered. (Previous accounts of the raid have invariably stated that the two containers which failed to come off other planes also contained explosives; both, however, were arms containers and their loss did not affect the amount of gun-cotton available.) It had been planned to blow up two of the three piers plus the abutment, but Paterson realised he had only enough explosive to demolish just one pier. He decided on the westernmost one, the one most easily reached from the farm track up which the explosive had to be hauled. He decided to place 640lb against the pier and 160lb against its abutment. The twelve sappers began stacking the gun-cotton against the concrete. Using a pair of Slingsby extendable ladders that had been dropped (one pair was missing with Daly's plane, three others could not be found), Lance-Corporal Doug Jones and others fixed a metal wire halfway up the pier to facilitate the stacking. The detonators, which the sappers had carried inside their shirts in tins lined with cotton wool, were inserted in the explosive and the long fuzes connected.

Earlier, Lieutenant Deane-Drummond had discovered a small concrete bridge, across a side stream of the Tragino, the Ginestra. It lay

The little bridge on the track between the farm buildings and the aqueduct which was discovered by Lieutenant Deane-Drummond and which he decided to blow up with the last load of explosives brought from the DZ. Officially, he did it because he judged it would hamper repair of the aqueduct, but inwardly — as he admitted years later — he also did it 'for the fun of the thing'.

about 130 yards from the aqueduct and carried the track from the farm buildings to the aqueduct. Figuring that its destruction would delay the repair of the aqueduct, Deane-Drummond waited until enough explosive had been carried up to the aqueduct, then stopped the last of the porters, who was carrying two 40lb boxes on his shoulders. Ordering Lance-Corporal Robert Watson and Sapper Alan Ross to place the charges, he sent a message to Pritchard explaining that he would blow the small bridge as soon as he heard the big bang.

About this time, there was another alarm, as the disturbing drone of an airplane was heard approaching in the distance. A heavily-loaded bomber flew directly over the aqueduct, too high for the men below to recognise whether it was Italian, German, or one of theirs. (It seems certain that this was the Whitley carrying Daly's party to the wrong valley.)

The charges in place, the Italians were shepherded back into the farm house near the little bridge. They were told that to leave the building would mean death, for a sentry with orders to shoot at sight had been posted outside the door. No such order was given, but the threat sufficed.

At 0.30 a.m., all was ready. Pritchard fired a single slab of gun cotton as a signal for all except the demolition party to withdraw to a safe position some 200 yards to the west, behind a small spur near the smaller aqueduct. As the echo of the warning signal echoed in the still air, Paterson lit a 60-second fuse and he and Pritchard hurriedly ran for cover behind an outcrop of rock. At the small bridge, Sapper Ross lit his fuse, and he and Deane-Drummond withdrew behind the cottages.

In their sheltered positions everyone waited, in great tension, for the two explosions. However, when the minute ran out, nothing happened. In their hurry, Pritchard and Paterson had forgotten to count the seconds so, after waiting what seemed almost two full minutes, they got up and cautiously walked towards the aqueduct to examine the presumably faulty fuse. They had covered no more than a dozen yards when there was an ear-splitting crack, followed by a tremendous explosion, as the aqueduct went up in a cloud of flying concrete, iron rails and pieces of masonry.

Almost at the same moment, the little bridge went up too. The debris showered Deane-Drummond and Ross and crashed on to the roof of the farm buildings. The people inside panicked and one woman ran out with a baby in her arms. Deane-Drummond and Ross walked up to inspect 'their' bridge. It had been neatly cut and one end lay in the bed of the stream. Quickly, they joined the rest of the party at the assembly position.

Meanwhile, Pritchard and Paterson had picked themselves up and gone to inspect the main objective. The others impatiently awaited their return. They had been keyed up for this moment for the past six weeks and the thought of failure was almost unbearable. When the two returned, they were assailed by questions from all sides. Pritchard put up his hand, and everybody stopped talking. 'Listen', was all he said. Straining their ears, the men heard the sound of a great waterfall. Overjoyed at the success of their mission and oblivious to the fact that they were in enemy territory, everyone cheered and yapped wildly.

Running down to the aqueduct, the men took in the damage they had wrought. One pier had gone altogether. Another leaned at a crazy angle. Half the aqueduct was down. From square breaches in the concrete water runway, a rush of water was pouring down the Tragino valley, both from the western end, from which direction water was being pumped, and from the higher eastern end where the breach resulted in the water running back, to spill out over the debris and join the other flow.

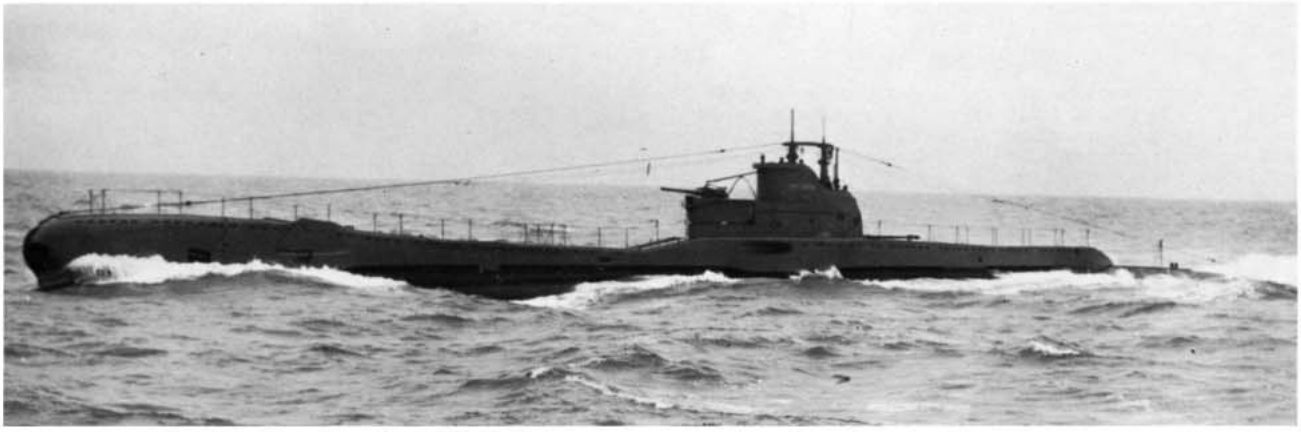
It was now time to withdraw. For the first time, the news that a submarine would be awaiting them at the mouth of the Sele was broken to the men. Thereupon Pritchard ordered the group to split up in three parties, each with two officers and about ten men, and each to make its way to the coast independently, moving by night and lying up during the day. This would give the party the best chance of getting to the coast undetected. Pritchard and Deane-Drummond would take one party, Jowett and Lucky another, and Lea and Paterson the third.

He also gave orders to lighten the loads. All the sapper equipment was abandoned. As the plan was to get to the rendezvous unseen and unheard, the Bren guns and most of the sub-machine guns were to be taken to bits and pushed into the mud. Each party would retain only one Thompson. This still left each man with a 30lb pack containing five day's rations and a mess tin, plus a .32 Colt or automatic pistol, Commando knife and two grenades. In addition, divided among them, they carried about 10 water bottles, 10 miniature Primus stoves and 10 petrol containers.

It was clear to all that Lance-Corporal Boulter would have to be left behind. Making him as comfortable as possible, Pritchard bound up his ankle with a damp cloth and a small splint, and left him a quantity of pain-killers, a map and a compass. Both men realised that Boulter would soon be taken prisoner and that he would be interrogated to find out more about the others. Pritchard told him to disclose only his rank, name and army number, then, as cheerful as he could muster, shook hands with him. Every man came to say goodbye to Boulter. They left him part of their chocolate and cigarette ration and, at Boulter's own request, a tommy-gun.

The interpreters returned to the farmhouse to repeat the order to the Italians to stay indoors, threatening that sentries were outside with orders to shoot to kill. It was then about 1.00 a.m. in the morning of Tuesday, February 11. The 29 men were ready to move off. They had five nights to cover the 60 miles to the coast.

The Tragino aqueduct as it appears today. The water runs in a hollow duct beneath a grass surface which allows it to be used also as a bridge. It was repaired within two-and-a-half days, and reconnaissance photographs taken on February 12 — 36 hours after the raid — already seemed to show no damage which initially led the War Office to believe that the raid had misfired.



HMS *Triumph* of the First Submarine Flotilla based at Malta was assigned the task of picking up the members of 'X' Troop near the mouth of the River Sele, south of Salerno on the western coast of Italy, five nights after the operation. (IWM)

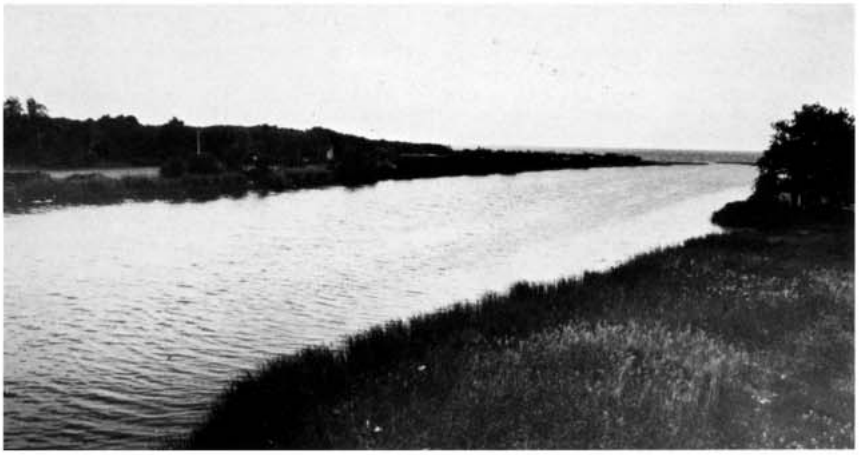
THE BID FOR ESCAPE

Pritchard's party left first. They had not gone far when Deane-Drummond ran back to say a final farewell to Boulter. Now all alone, Boulter watched the three groups toiling uphill until they disappeared over the crest. When his foot began to swell, he cut away his boot to ease the pain. Limping to a small farm hut, he dropped off to sleep.

Waking after dawn, he saw one of the Italians, the uniformed soldier, cautiously come out of the house, followed by others. When he saw the soldier mounting a bicycle and pedalling off towards Calitri, he fired a burst after him, but the man sped on. Realising he had given away his position, Boulter dragged himself uphill and hid behind a boulder. Soon, he saw two cars arrive with two carabinieri and several civilians with shot-guns, and later a truckload of Italian soldiers. Boulter held them off until he ran out of ammo. On capture, he was handcuffed and severely beaten up. He was made to hobble to Calitri and from there taken by car to Naples Central Prison. Only then was his fractured ankle treated. As expected, he was interrogated, the main questions being about the number and whereabouts of the other 'paracadutisti'. He disclosed nothing.

All three escape parties had made their way up the mountain behind the aqueduct. Alone, in a strange, desolate mountainous land, 2,000 feet above sea-level, in the cold February night, they struggled through snow and mud, forded little streams and clambered across impassable-looking ravines. The men soon learned to ignore the innumerable farm dogs, barking away in the darkness, but rousing nobody. Although they shared many similar experiences, each group had its own dramatic moments and the story of each is worth recounting.

Pritchard's party consisted of 11 men and included, amongst others, Deane-Drummond; Sergeant Lawley; Corporal Philip Julian; Lance-Corporals Doug Jones and Doug Henderson (who, in spite of Pritchard's order, had decided to hold on to his Bren gun and carried the heavy load across-country right to the end); and the two interpreters, Nastri and Picchi. Their plan was to follow the mountain ridge until they reached the Sele watershed. From there, they would make their way down the north side of the river valley towards the Mediterranean. Climbing the steep hill behind the aqueduct, they skirted the snow-line. Pritchard halted for a short rest after each three quarters of an hour. Impassable gorges, which had been impossible to detect from the valley below, forced them to make time-consuming detours. Fighting exhaustion, cold and fear, they struggled on until, at dawn, they reached a wooded ravine. Here they hid up for the day. They brewed sweet tea and tried to eat their boiled pieces of greasy pemmican, a ration developed for Arctic expeditions but which most men found nauseating. Consulting their maps, Pritchard and Deane-Drummond found that they were



The evacuation plan called for 'X' Troop to assemble at a spot close to the river mouth *(above)*. A map and an aerial photograph were provided to pinpoint the RV point. Light signals were arranged to bring in the submarine. However, as it happened, one of the two diversionary bombers accompanying the raid, 'S' for Sugar, developed engine trouble and the pilot, Pilot Officer Jack Watherspoon, by an unbelievable coincidence, chose this very same area to crash-land his plane, and sent a coded message asking for the crew to be picked up. The Admiralty judged that this message had compromised the pick-up rendezvous and, not wanting to risk a valuable submarine, cancelled its mission. *Triumph* had already sailed, but was recalled at 8.30 p.m. on February 13. This harsh decision has since been severely criticised and, not unlogically, has led to conjectures that the Combined Operations planners never really expected that anyone of 'X' Troop would ever reach the rendezvous and had written them off beforehand.

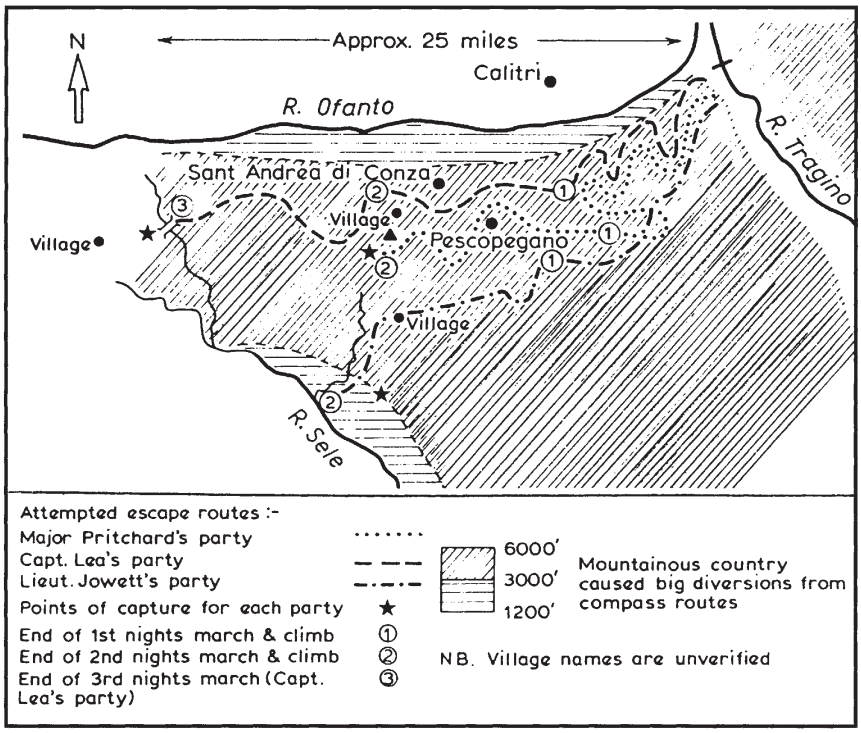
After blowing up the aqueduct, 'X' Troop divided up in three escape parties, each with two officers and each to make its way to the submarine rendezvous on the coast, 60 miles to the west, by a separate route, cross-country and moving only at night. In the event, none of them made it. The first party, led by Pritchard and Deane-Drummond and consisting of 11 men, laid up for the day in a wooded valley *(above)* after a night of struggling through mud and snow, across gullies and mountain streams. They had toiled for hours and covered at least 15 miles, yet the map showed them they were only five miles closer to the coast.

The next night, the going was as slow as before. Having slogged across country a little distance from but parallel to a road for some time, Pritchard decided they should risk taking the road to make up for lost time. They joined the road at this spot, just west of the village of Sant 'Andrea di Conza. Coming down the track in the foreground, the group turned left at the road. The bridge across the mountain stream which skirts the village is visible on the right.

near the village of San Lorenzo and that, although they must have slogged over 15 miles, they were only five miles closer to the coast. During the day, they saw a light spotter plane, flying low and clearly searching the area. Later, they heard some children play nearby with dogs, but these did not discover the men lying in the nearby scrub.

Next night, they crossed a stream (one man slipping from the stepping stones and falling in) and scaled a slippery cliff, the steep rise of which they had already noted with disgust during the day. On the crest, they used a road as their guide, marching parallel with, but about 400 yards from it. They skirted the villages of Pescopagano and Sant 'Andrea di Conza. As they were still well behind schedule and no one seemed to be using it, Pritchard decided to risk taking the main road, and from there on they made good progress. After marching uphill for some six miles, they came to a hilltop crossroads which formed the watershed of the Sele river, the highest point on their route to the coast. From now on, the way ran downhill, into the valley of the Sele. Suddenly, without warning, they came upon a hooded cart drawn by a pony trundling towards them from the opposite direction. Pritchard quickly ordered Private Nastri to march in front of the column, as if in command, and call the step in Italian. As they swung past the cart, Nastri cheerfully called 'Buon giorno' to the driver, a peasant women in black dress, and she smiled and waved back. This was encouraging and, when shortly after they came upon a village, they repeated the same thing. The group marched through the deserted village unchallenged, but just past the last house a farm worker called out to them and started asking questions. Without stopping, Nastri explained that they were Austrian troops on manoeuvre and politely declined an offer to bring his men in for a meal at the man's house.

Aiming in the direction of the Sele mouth, they left the road and struck south-west. They had planned to spend daylight in a small copse half way up a hill. However, on reaching it, they found it sheltered a farmhouse which was not on the map. Dead-tired and utterly disappointed, the men collapsed. Their sweat-soaked clothes soon turned their bodies ice-cold. The map showed another small wood a little bit further on, on the summit of another hill, named the Cresta di Gallo — the Cock's Comb — overlooking the village of Teora. They pressed on up this mountain in search of the wood, until they found themselves trudging through the snow. On reaching the summit, they looked all around them, but there was not a single tree in sight. They could not believe it, until they discovered a large number of tree stumps in the ground — the whole



The precise spots where the parties of Jowett and Lea were captured are unknown, the stars being only an indication.

Now marching on good surface, the party picked up speed. Six miles further on, they reached this hilltop crossroads which was the highest point on their route. From here, the road led downhill into the Sele valley. It was at this crossroads that the party saw a pony-drawn cart coming towards them and Private Nastri, the Italian interpreter, marched them past it, calling the step in Italian. The Italian peasant woman, half-asleep at the reins, suspected nothing and the party escaped unchallenged.

At dawn of the second day, Pritchard's party found itself on top of the Cresta di Gallo, a barren hill above the village of Teora. Discovered by an Italian peasant who fled down the hill to give the warning, they soon found themselves in the amazing situation of being surrounded by a motley crowd of some 400 unarmed civilians, men, women and children who came up the hill excited and curious to see the foreign invaders. Far in the rear were some troops but, because of the women and children, Pritchard could not bring himself to start a fight and the party was forced to lay down their arms. 'I have never felt so ashamed before or since, that we should have surrendered to a lot of practically unarmed Italian peasants', wrote Lieutenant Deane-Drummond later. This picture was taken from the top of the Cresta di Gallo looking down on Teora.

wood had been felled. With dawn breaking, they went to earth, exhausted and shivering, some men sheltering in a small cave they had found, others huddling behind the tree stumps and some juniper bushes.

About 6.30 a.m., a peasant came up the hill with a donkey and, although he acted as if he had seen nothing, it was clear that he had spotted them, or at least their footsteps in the snow. Quickly, Pritchard sent Nastri after him with orders to tell him that they were German and Italian mountain troops on exercise. Nastri did as told, but returned unsatisfied with the result. Although the man had accepted his explanation, he seemed unwilling to talk to him and had hurried off down the track. Shortly after, two men armed with shot-guns, appeared on a ridge above them, then disappeared again.

Down in Teora village, the donkey man, considerably shaken, had reported the men in strange uniforms on the hill to the local carabinieri. Since the raid, the Italian authorities had given out warnings by radio and telephone that enemy parachutist saboteurs were on the loose and the civilian population was asked to keep a look-out for them. On receipt of the report, a call for troop assistance went out. Meanwhile, farmers armed with shot-guns encircled the ridge to keep watch on the reported enemy. Presently, cars and lorries began to arrive with more carabinieri and men from a mountain regiment.

Up on the hill, the British awaited developments. Pritchard had ordered all maps and papers to be burned and some sort of defensive circle to be set up. Corporal Henderson still had his Bren; there was the one tommy-gun; all had their pistols in one hand and a grenade in the other.

To their surprise, they saw not troops, but a large number of civilians coming up the hill. The excitement in the village had been such that the population had not waited for the troops to deploy. First spectators were a group of children, accompanied by a great many mongrel dogs. After them came the women, calling for their children to be careful. On their heels followed the civilian men of the village. Finally, last of all, came the troops and the carabinieri.

The parachutists were ready to fight it out with the little ammunition they had, but who was prepared to open fire on women and children? Clutching their weapons, his men stole glances at Pritchard, waiting for whatever decision he would make. Agonisingly slow, the civilian crowd, now some 400 strong, circled around the beleaguered little group, until they formed a human ring around it, not 20 paces away. 'I think we've had it', said Pritchard. Deane-Drummond protested, suggesting they could try lobbing grenades over the civilians. Anything better than just doing nothing. 'All right, Tony', said the major, 'you throw a grenade at those people on the right and I will throw mine over there.' With a sinking feeling, the lieutenant realised he could not do it. 'All right', he said. 'You win, Sir.'

Pritchard told his stunned men to surrender. Only one man reacted. Corporal Henderson made a break for it down the hillside, but, fired at by the farmers and chased by the carabinieri, he did not get very far. Now surrounded by Italian troops, Pritchard told his men to drop their pistols and grenades, but he himself could not do so with his own grenade, as he had already taken the pin out. A nervous Italian sergeant put his pistol at the major's temple, shouting at him to drop the grenade. Not until Nastri explained the matter to him, did the excitable sergeant lower his gun and order the crowd to one side so that Pritchard could hurl the grenade to a safe spot.

To their disbelief, all men were then handcuffed and chained together, every second man in addition being chained to a heavy iron ball. Only Pritchard was spared the humiliation. Carrying the iron balls between them, the group was then led downhill, spat at and derided by the civilians. On reaching Teora, they were lined up on the village square where two local dignitaries proceeded to address them, one calling them 'English desperadoes', and the other calling on the excited crowd to lynch them. The Italian sergeant, realising they were his prize, tried to keep order, but he only managed to hold back the crowd by having his men fire a volley over it.

The group was then locked up in the local carabinieri building. Later, an elderly Italian general came in who, in English, told Pritchard that, if they gave their word of honour not to escape, they could drive their own lorry to their next prison, escorted only by armed troops in cars in front and rear. The major declined, fearing it was an excuse to machine-gun them in the vehicle on the pretext of attempted escape. That evening, they were herded into a lorry, still chained and heavily guarded, and driven back eastwards to the railway station of Calitri, located in the valley below the town and not three miles from the destroyed aqueduct. Here they were placed in an evil-smelling waiting-room, again under guard.

Handcuffed and chained together, the men were then marched down to Teora where they were locked up in the local carabinieri police station. The original carabinieri building was destroyed in the earthquake of November 23, 1980, which laid the whole town in ruins, and the present one is a modern replacement.

The other two escape parties were also rounded up in the Sele valley. A few hours after Pritchard's party had surrendered and not two miles away, Lieutenant Jowett's party of seven was cornered on a river hillside by a superior force of armed peasants and carabinieri troops and, having killed two Italians in the ensuing gunfight before being forced to surrender, they very narrowly escaped being executed on the spot by the furious mob.

By then, the evening of February 12, the other parties were still on the loose. From the aqueduct, Captain Lea and Lieutenant Paterson had led their party on a route a little north of that of Pritchard. Their party of 11 included Sergeant John Walker; Corporals Derry Fletcher and Peter O'Brien; Lance-Corporals Watson, Pexton and Jim Maher; and Private Parker. They faced the same exhausting impossible conditions as the others and made no better progress. Lea called a halt every two hours. Scaling one ridge after the other, they pushed on, silent and automatically. Before dawn, they hid in a tree-covered ravine, falling asleep on a dry river bed. They woke up to find the water washing over them and had to grab their floating gear. They heard spotter planes and the sound of distant trucks.

Next night, their will-power kept them going and at dawn they found a good hiding place — a cleft in the rocks high on a mountain slope. About noon, they observed a shepherd boy with a flock of sheep and, from their hiding place, listened to him singing beautiful Italian songs. The third night, some men were so weary that they began lagging behind. Lea himself had to stop because his boots were ill-fitting. He had bought a pair of new mountain boots in Malta, but these now caused him agonising pain and he had to cut them open with his knife. To make better progress, he too decided they should risk marching on the road. Soon they had covered six miles and their spirits rose.

Unexpectedly, they came upon a stone bridge, skew across a river and with a sharp corner just beyond it. With drawn pistol, Lea went ahead to reconnoitre it. The road around the bend seemed empty and he waved his men on. Just as they were all on the bridge, there was a rush of feet from the darkness on either end and a mixed crowd of civilians, men and women, some of the men armed with shot-guns, interspersed with a few carabinieri, blocked the bridge. Like on Cresta di Gallo, the unarmed civilians faced Lea and his men with a serious dilemma. Lea tried shouting 'Deutsch . . . Deutsch', but the Italian sergeant in charge, pointing a bayoneted rifle at Lea's chest, replied with a yelled 'You speak big lie . . . You all Inglesi!' and it was clear that the game was up. They could not have been ambushed more effectively. Lea and Paterson later estimated that they were then still about 30 miles from the coast. Handcuffed and chained, they were loaded on mule carts and, escorted by carabinieri and jeering villagers, transported to Calitri railway station. Here they met up with Pritchard's party, who had already spent the night there.

The party led by Lieutenant Jowett and Flight Lieutenant Lucky was the smallest: with Sergeant Clements, Corporal Grice and Sappers Ross, Struthers and Crawford it counted only seven men. Their route was to the south of the other two. Both Jowett and Ross had kept a sub-machine gun. Jowett, a wiry Canadian whose nickname was 'Killer', set a tough pace. At early light, they descended into a ravine, hoping to hide up. However, they found its bottom waterlogged and, with no time to look for a better place, had to spend the day lying in the chilly marsh.

That night, they came across a mountain road, which the map showed led to the Sele valley. Although Lucky disagreed with him, Jowett decided to take the road. Some time later, rounding a bend, they unexpectedly came upon a village. There was no real way around it, so they cautiously sneaked through its moonlit street. As they went along, dogs started up in a crescendo of barking, but none of the villagers came outside to inspect and they reached the far end of the village without seeing anyone. Not taking any more risks, they left the road again and followed a stream which the map showed fed into the Sele river. On reaching the river, they followed it, staying away from the valley road. Once, at a hairpin bend of the river, they took a short cut across country. Just before dawn, entering a fruit plantation to hide up, they suddenly came face to face with a Italian peasant farmworker. Jowett trained his gun on him, but the man flashed off in the darkness. Jowett went after him with his knife, but soon lost him among the trees. Certain that the man would betray their position, they moved off quickly. They came to a point where the river became wider and had some bush-covered islets in the stream which looked like a good hiding place. They waded across to one of them and settled down to rest. However, with daylight, they found that the leafless bushes did not at all shield them from view as much as hoped and they had no other option but to lie absolutely flat and still.

Around 11.00 a.m., a man appeared on the far bank with a dog. The animal had clearly picked up their scent, for it pointed its head at them and actually swam across, running and barking among them. The man called his dog back and made off fast but it was obvious that they had been spotted and would have to move again. As they waded back across, one trooper went under and, although two others managed to haul him to shallower water, he had lost the tommy-gun he was carrying. They climbed the riverside hill, finding cover in a patch of shrubs, and awaited developments.

Two hours later, they saw cars and trucks coming down the river road from both east and west. The columns halted directly below them and disgorged a crowd of some 100 armed civilians. A similar crowd was assembling the other side. They were surrounded.

Captain Lea's party of 11 held out only a little longer. It was cleverly ambushed while crossing a bridge on the third night. The exact places where Lea's and Jowett's parties were captured are not known and the pictures therefore do not purport to show the actual sites but serve only to illustrate the kind of terrain through which they had to struggle. In retrospect, the 'X' Troop escape parties never stood much chance of getting to the submarine RV on foot. The distance and the difficult terrain made it unlikely that they could make the deadline. At least one survivor thought afterwards that they would have done better to have stolen vehicles and driven to the coast.

After capture, all three parties were transported to the little railway station of Calitri, just a few miles away from the aqueduct they had destroyed. Put in the waiting-room under heavy guard, the 29 men languished here for two days, uncertain whether they would be regarded as spies, with the risk of being shot, or treated as ordinary prisoners-of-war.

More trucks arrived, this time with armed troops. With these firing over their heads, the peasant force began moving up the hill from both sides, spread out in lines abreast. As the first line topped the mound below them, Jowett loosed a few shots above their heads. When this did not halt the advance, he fired three aimed bursts. Three men, a carabinieri and two civilians, fell and the rest scurried down the hill. Jowett ordered a shift in position to a small copse a bit further down, telling the men to run down to it while he occupied the Italians. They all made it, except that Trooper Crawford was hit in the arm by an Italian bullet. They joined the fight with their pistols, but it was a lost battle. The Italian fire intensified and the copse was riddled with bullets. Jowett ordered the others to surrender but Sergeant Clements refused to give up without him. Only after the lieutenant agreed to come with them, did Clements rise and signal surrender with a handkerchief.

The Italians were in a foul mood. Jowett's bursts had killed two of them and several more had been wounded. A civilian, armed with a rifle, two pistols and with two crossed bandoliers across his chest, took charge and ordered the prisoners stripped to the waist. They were marched down the hill, lined up against an outcrop of rock and 20 men lined up facing them. With a shock, the Britons realised they were going to be executed. Lucky tried telling the Italian that they were now prisoners protected by the Geneva Convention, but the little man reacted by putting his pistol against Lucky's head, shouting that they were murderers and ex-convicts. Next, he began an excited speech, inciting the crowd to avenge the death of the two Italians and have no mercy on the British bandits. He raised his arm and the firing squad took aim. He was about to give the command when, from the right, a army officer on horseback appeared, at the gallop and shouting 'Militari!, Militari!' He halted between the firing party and the prisoners, leaped from his horse and with a gloved hand struck the bumptious Italian across both sides of the face. Next, he turned to the prisoners and explained, in English, that they were now safe in Army hands and would be treated as prisoners-of-war. Italian soldiers took charge of them, returned their clothes to them, and marched them off to the nearest village, two of them supporting the wounded Crawford. After a doctor had dressed Crawford's wound, they were locked up for the night.

Next morning, they were put on trucks and driven to Calitri, to join the other two parties in the railway station. They arrived not long after Lea's party had been brought in. It was now the morning of Thursday, February 13.

An Italian army general visited them, praising their bravery and reiterating that they would be treated as prisoners-of-war. Later, a group of Fascists blackshirts arrived who demanded they be handed over to them, but the carabinieri officer refused saying he only obeyed his general's orders.

At 10.00 a.m. on the 15th, a train arrived and, one hour after sunset, they arrived at Naples, where they were again chained together. On the platform, people gazed at the prisoners in strange uniforms, marching in step, erect and proud in spite of the iron balls.

The news that they were English 'paracadutisti' went round like a flash. Outside, lorries were waiting to take them to Naples Central Prison. Here, to their surprise, they found Private Boulter again, whom they had left behind at the aqueduct five days before.

Next day, the last five of 'X' Troop to evade captivity were also brought in. After their misdrop, Daly's party, which included Lance-Corporal Tomlin and sappers Davidson, Parker and Pryor, had started to climb the hill towards the next valley, hoping to reach the aqueduct in time to assist in its demolition. However, halfway up the hillside, they heard the roar of a big explosion and, knowing they were too late to be of use, they turned round and started their trek for the coast. They sheltered for the day in a wooden hut. Fortunate not to come across any farms or village, they escaped capture for three more nights. Only on the third day, holing up in a wood, did they venture out to a lonely farmhouse. Daly and one other man boldly approached a man and a woman standing outside and asked for food, but the Italians' only response was to hurry inside and lock all doors and windows.

By dawn of Saturday, February 15, the party of five was still 18 miles from the rendezvous point, hungry and extremely tired. As the submarine was due that night, they decided to make a dash for it and cover the remaining distance in daylight. However, at about midday, they ran into a company of Italian soldiers, taking a rest by the roadside. Trying to bluff their way out, Daly declared that they were a German aircrew whose plane had crashed and demanded a car, saying they had to be in Naples by 2.00 p.m. The officer in command was not convinced and, pulling open Daly's jumping-jacket, revealed his British captain's epaulette. Marched back to the nearest village, they were handcuffed and chained and taken by army truck to a prison in Naples, a civilian prison different from that to where the other parties had been taken. Locked alone in a cell, Daly escaped that same night, only to be recaptured when he tried to jump a train, missed his hold and was knocked out in the fall. Soon after, he and his men were reunited with the others at Naples Central Prison. For the first time since leaving Malta, all 35 members of 'X' Troop were in one place again.

On the 15th, the 29 men were transported by train to Naples and imprisoned in Naples Central Prison, a fortress-like structure on Via Nuova Poggioreale. Here, to their surprise, they found Lance-Corporal Boulter, whom they had left behind at the aqueduct with a broken ankle. A few days later, the last of 'X' Troop to evade capture, Captain Daly and his four men, were brought in here too. At the prison, the men were thoroughly questioned. Today, Naples Prison is still a top-security jail, with armed guards on the sentry-walk along the top of the wall. When Karel took this picture, he was immediately accosted by a plain-clothes man telling him that photography of the building was strictly forbidden.

Telegraph & Independent

SHEFFIELD, SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 1941 ONE PENNY

CITY 6 A.M.

OUR PARATROOPS STRIKE

Italy Says They Attacked Power Plant and Railways

TOMMY GUN FIGHT WITH POLICE DESCRIBED

BRITISH parachute troops have been in action for the first time, according to news from Rome yesterday.

They were dropped, the Italians say, in two provinces of Southern Italy, with orders to attack roads and railways and to destroy hydro-electric power plant, but were all captured before they could do "serious damage."

They are described as wearing khaki overalls and Air Force caps, were armed with Tommy guns, automatic pistols, and had Italian money.

The War Office last night declined to make any comment on the Italian announcement.

The Italian war communique said the attacks were made in Calabria, the province in the toe of Italy, and Lucania, farther north, between the heel and the toe.

The communique said:

"During the night of February 10th-11th (Monday night) the enemy dropped detachments of parachutists in Calabria and Lucania. They were armed with machine-guns, hand grenades, and explosives.

Killed Two

"Their objects were to destroy our lines of communication and to damage the local hydro-electric power stations.

"Owing to the vigilance and prompt intervention of our defence units all the parachutists were captured before they were able to cause serious damage.

"In an engagement which took place one gendarme and one civilian were killed.

"It has not yet been decided whether to treat these British parachutists as prisoners or spies," Italian officials stated in Rome last night.

They declared that the men they claimed were British parachutists were dressed in khaki clothing [illegible] spoke fluent Italian, and had plenty of Italian lira.

Their purpose, the officials said, was to blow up railway junctions.

A fuller description of the rounding up of the parachutists given by the official Stefani agency last night said they landed between 10.30 p.m. on Monday and 2 a.m. on Tuesday.

Map showing the fast-flowing rivers of Lucania which supply the hydro-electric power. The crossed lines are railways.

Water Supply

The agency said:

"The parachutists, who carried automatic arms and explosives, certainly intended to damage the regional water supply system, a magnificent achievement of the Fascist regime which made possible an agricultural revival throughout the district, together with railway lines, bridges, and roads.

"Having landed in a clearing surrounded by forests, the parachutists occupied some farms and immobilised the peasants.

"One parachutist who had broken a leg was left in one of these farms, where he was later arrested by guards.

Shouted "Duce"

"The British parachutists deceived the peasant farmers by shouting 'Duce,' and so inducing them to open their doors to them.

"After abandoning their injured companion the British made their way to the springs which feed the irrigation system, guiding themselves by means of maps with which they were provided.

"But the alarm had been given, and guards, co-operating with the military police and the military organisations of the Fascist Party, drew a cordon round the area.

"A search was instituted, making the position of the parachutists very precarious.

"Speedily surrounded they were unable to execute their plans and had to hide in woods to avoid capture.

Split Up

"To make capture more difficult they divided up into several groups, hoping that some at least would be able to break through the cordon and carry out a part of their plans.

"Their plan failed for while eleven parachutists were seized in one place seven others were arrested at the same time a mile or two away.

"The latter attempted to put up a resistance turning a Tommy gun on the patrol consisting of one guard, one police constable, and a shepherd who was guiding them over the mountain paths.

"Shots from the British officer's gun put the policeman and the shepherd out of action.

"The guard left alone defended himself with his rifle, forcing the parachutists to remain behind a rock until other guards, hearing the shots, came up.

"Seeing that all resistance was hopeless the parachutists surrendered.

"Captain Taken"

"Another group which had taken to the scrubland remained to be found. The search went on and the rest of the parachutists, including a captain, were seized without trouble.

War Office Silent

But Axis Will be Troubled

(FROM THE MILITARY MAN)

THE War Office last night declined to make any comment of any kind on the Italian communiqué which said that enemy parachutists had been captured while making an attempt to destroy hydro-electric works in Southern Italy.

If the Italian communiqué has stated the facts correctly it may be assumed that the parachutists were at large for a period during which they could have done an enormous amount of damage.

According to the enemy they were dropped during Monday night and the communiqué came out yesterday.

Works of the hydro-electric type are easily put out of commission and the Italian communiqué suggests that the parachutists were at liberty for a long time.

REACHED OBJECTIVES

It is also clear that the men must have reached their objective otherwise the enemy communiqué would not state the nature of the objective with such confidence, as there are many military objectives in Calabria and Lucania.

Apart from the big hydro-electric power station in Lucania there is the important train ferry service between Calabria and Sicily where the German bomber squadrons are based.

All supplies for them will pass along this train ferry and any damage done to the track, the terminus at the Calabrian end, or to the dumps which must be there, will hinder considerably the operations of the Luftwaffe.

Italy's greatest aqueduct, which supplies almost the whole of Southern Italy, is at Apulla, in Calabria.

SOME SUCCESS

Clearly, therefore, some success must have attended the attack, otherwise the enemy would not know the objectives.

The communique also admits damage was done but minimises it in the usual way.

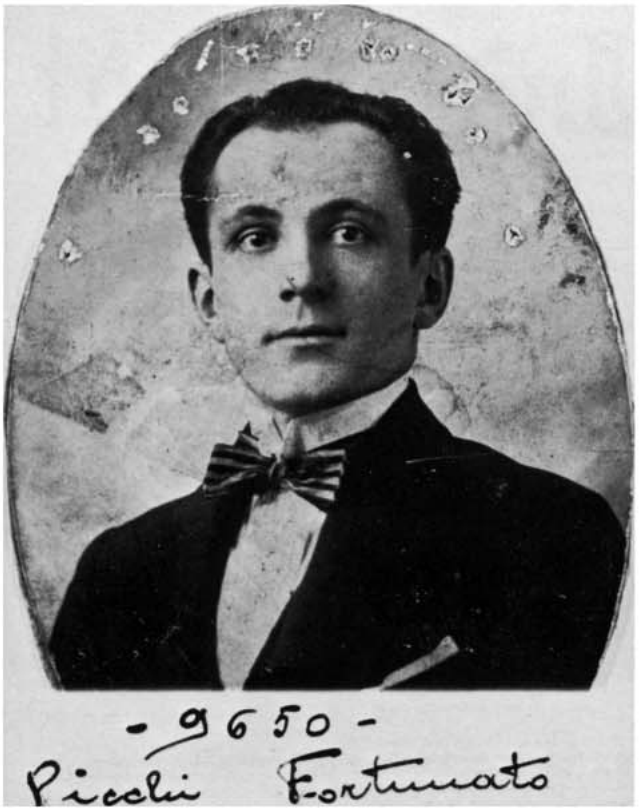
If these parachutists are British this would be the first hint that has been given to the public that such parachutists exist, and there is immense curiosity on the subject, but last night the War Office was entirely non-committal and would not even admit the existence of parachutists.

If, however, such a body does exist it will be an additional worry for both Mussolini and Hitler, for their many bases and invasion ports will be exposed to a fresh peril.

The British will be delighted to know that such a body exists and the enemy will be greatly perturbed.

At the time of writing, however, there is no information available for publication apart from the enemy's statement.

First news of the Tragino raid reached the British press on February 14, three days after the raid, when the Italian government issued a statement that British parachutists had landed in Italy. It dominated next day's headlines. (Courtesy of H. Tomlin)



In the aftermath of the raid, 'X' Troop lost one man: Picchi, the brave, little Italian volunteer. Captured with Pritchard's party on the second day after the raid, his fascist interrogators quickly found out that he was of Italian birth and soon weeded out his true identity. Tried as a spy, Picchi was executed on April 6, 1941. Exactly how quickly his identity was known is shown by the date stamped on the back of Picchi's portrait: February 17, 1941 — five days after his capture. The portrait is the original picture used in the inquest against Picchi and was provided by the Questura of Florence, his home town. Dating from before his emigration to Britain in 1929, it shows a very young Picchi. Later in the war, it was seized by the Allies and ended up in SOE files.

IN CAPTIVITY

As the men of 'X' Troop waited in their cells, morale was still high. Over the following days, each man was interrogated several times in turn. When asked for military information, the men delighted in giving fancy answers. One man, when asked what type of plane had dropped them, said 'A Guiness Two-Three'. Another answered the same question with 'A Heinz 57'. Each questioning ended with the threat that next day at 6.00 a.m. they would all be shot. The execution promise was repeated so often that the men began to look upon it as a farce.

However, to one of them, it was no joke. Fortunato Picchi, the little Italian volunteer, was very afraid that he would be found out, both as an Italian and a civilian. Although a naturalised Briton, he was sure the Fascists would regard him as an Italian and thus a traitor. The others tried to cheer him up and told him to stick to his story that he was a Free Frenchman. Yet, very Italian in looks and his English not quite perfect, Picchi never stood a chance. After a long interview, he came back to his cell very dejected. All through the night, Lance-Corporal Jones tried to comfort him. Next morning, the Italians came and took Picchi away. Tried as a traitor, he was executed seven weeks later, on Palm Sunday, April 6, 1941.

After Picchi had gone, the interrogators turned their attention to the other Italian-looking interpreter, Private Nastri. Contrary to poor Picchi, he had lived in London from childhood, spoke a real Cockney accent, and was able to stick to his guns that he was John Tristan, a British subject and soldier. However, his escape was still a narrow one. The Italians cleverly discovered the name Nastri in his pseudonym, and even confronted him with an aunt of his who lived near Naples. Fortunately, she had enough sense to deny knowing him, and Nastri was let off the hook.

Lucky, the third interpreter, being so obviously British in appearance and demeanour, was never accused of being Italian. Speaking the language, he managed to secure several privileges and was even allowed to leave the jail under escort to buy shaving kit and new underclothes for the prisoners.

Savoy's Picchi dies for us

Express Staff Reporter

He helped our paratroops

FREE Italians in London mourned last night their first casualty of the war, Fortunato Picchi, forty-seven-year-old ex-assistant banqueting manager of the Savoy Hotel—a hero in dress clothes.

For it has been established that the 5-ft.-nothing Italian whose bald head, fringed with black hair, had bobbed to most European and American celebrities was the Fortunato Picchi the Duce claims to have shot as a traitor.

The notice of his death, published yesterday, read :—

Picchi. On Palm Sunday, 1941, Fortunato Picchi sacrificed his life for the cause of freedom. A brave man of high ideals. Until the day breaks, dear.—F., R.I.P.

It was on Palm Sunday (April 6) that the Italians said they shot Picchi. An official statement from Rome alleged he was taken prisoner with the British paratroops who recently landed in Southern Italy.

RECOGNISED

It was said he was recognised and denounced after the paratroops had committed acts of sabotage in the Calabrian region.

Last night Mrs. C. Lantieri, of Sussex-gardens, W., English-born wife of a British descendant of an Italian family, told me the story of the ex-waiter who became so English in outlook that, according to Rome, he chose to die fighting his own country rather than keep a job that was sometimes worth £40 a week.

He came to live with her family twenty years ago. As a sergeant in the Italian army in the last war he had been wounded alongside the British in Salonika.

He was a genial little man, with a blue-bearded chin faintly

BACK PAGE, COL. SIX

WAITER HERO SHOT

FROM PAGE ONE

reminiscent of Mussolini's. His two passions were watching Arsenal play on Saturday afternoons and exercising his Alsatian dog Billy most mornings in Hyde Park.

Not for fortyrgrn years had he been back to Italy. His only links with the country remained the pictures of blue skies in his room and gifts to poor members of the Italian colony here.

He became openly anti-Fascist. When Italy declared war on Britain he said his country had been "sold to the Hun."

But he was interned, and sent to the Isle of Man. There he led the anti-Fascist group.

For six months he wrote letters to Mrs. Lantieri, telling how he had converted other internees, always ending, "I do not belong here."

He proved that on his release. He refused the offer of his old position, felt that a dress coat would irk his broad shoulders. He wanted a more active part in the war.

Said Mrs. Lantieri: "He did not tell me what his job was, did not suggest he had volunteered for anything dangerous. In going to Italy he must have realised he was taking his life in his hands.

"We want to have a memorial to him. And we think the best idea is to create a fund to buy a Spitfire, or part of one. That will give other Italians here a chance to hit back at the Fascisti.

"I inserted his obituary notice. The 'F' is for Florence, my Christian name.

"My late husband and I came to look on Mr. Picchi as a son. He became so English that we gave him the name of Wilfred."

Basil Cardew, Express Reporter, writes: The full story of the British paratroops landing in Italy two months ago may show that this daring operation met with considerable success.

From Italian reports it can be inferred that our men sabotaged vital railway communications and buildings connected with the Italian war effort. This is supported by indications of considerable disruption of communications in South Italy.

He Died for Freedom

A brief announcement in the Times records the death "For the cause of freedom" of an Italian who was executed by the Fascists as a traitor.

It reads:

"Picchi.—On Palm Sunday, 1941, Fortunato Picchi sacrificed his life for the cause of freedom. A brave man of high ideals. Until the day breaks, dear.—F."

Picchi was stated by Rome to have been taken prisoner with the British parachutists who landed recently in Italy.

He was middle-aged, 5ft. 6in. in height, and was associated with an Anti-Fascist group of Italians in

PICCHI.—On Palm Sunday, 1941, FORTUNATO PICCHI sacrificed his life for the cause of freedom. A brave man of high ideals. Until the day breaks, dear. —F. R.I.P.

FORTUNATO PICCHI

Picchi died without his comrades in 'X' Troop ever knowing his SOE background. They did, however, already learn about his death while still in PoW camp, from Italian newspapers. Picchi's sacrifice was also reported in several newspapers in Britain.

On February 28, the prisoners minus Picchi were transferred to a prisoner-of-war camp near Sulmona, Campo di Concentramento 78, deep in the Apennine mountains.

Shortly after, the six officer prisoners were separated from the others and moved to an Italian Air Force detention building on Naples aerodrome, where the accommodation and food was much better. The base commander, a Colonello Montalba, treated them with consideration and even interfered with the prison governor when he learned that the men at the jail were being fingerprinted and photographed.

A fortnight later, on February 28, the whole group of 34 was moved yet again. After a thorough search, in which much of the escape money, maps and tiny compasses with which they had been issued in Britain were found, the officers and men were all put on a train. A long journey through wild and mountainous countryside ended at Sulmona, a valley town in the Abruzzi mountains. After a five-mile march in drenching rain, which made them feel fresh but their guards miserable, they came to the Campo di Concentramento 78 PoW camp.

For two months, the 'X' Troop prisoners were isolated in two walled-off compounds within the camp, one for the officers and one for the men, and especially constructed for them. Halfway through, the American military attaché from Rome, Colonel Fiske, was allowed to visit them and he put pressure on the Italians to treat the parachutists as ordinary prisoners-of-war. Finally, they were let into the main part of the camp, the men joining the 800-odd other prisoners, and the officers going to the smaller officers' compound at the top of the camp.

'X' Troop soon settled down into the usual prisoner-of-war routine, with its boredom, petty guards, roll-calls and Red Cross parcels. They were shocked and depressed when they learned from an Italian newspaper of the execution of Picchi. After a few months, food rations were cut down to near-starvation diet and hunger became the main worry. In their letters home they were able to send some information by using the code learned at Mildenhall. In return they received maps, money and messages hidden in food parcels.

Today, the former PoW camp is a recruit-training centre of the Italian Army, known as Base Logistica de Fonte d'Amore. A modern building next to it houses a police academy.

ESCAPES

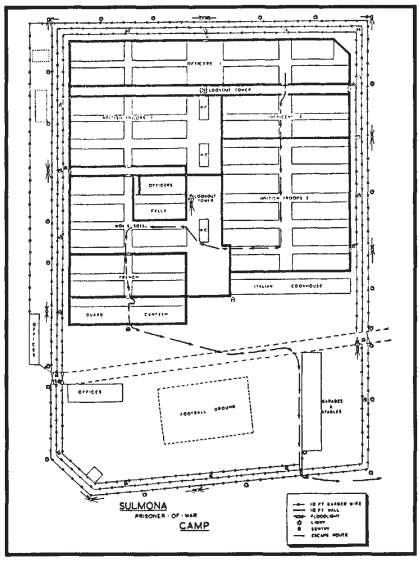
The men of 'X' Troop found that, on average, the animo for escapes among their fellow prisoners was not very great. Here again, they showed that they were of a different brand. Pritchard soon set up an escape committee, and he was the leading spirit behind many plans. Although not all attempts were successful, all officers of 'X' Troop made at least one escape attempt. Lea and Deane-Drummond made an daring attempt on the night of December 8/9, disguised as electricians and using a makeshift ladder. Jumping down the other side of the wall, Lea was hit in the leg by a sentry and only Deane-Drummond got away. He almost made it to Switzerland. While he was away, Lucky escaped across the wall with a ladder too, but did not get very far before being recaptured. As punishment, Pritchard, Paterson, Lucky and Deane-Drummond were sent to Campo 27, a special camp for dangerous prisoners in a monastery near Pisa. In June 1942, Deane-Drummond made a second successful escape from a hospital in Florence and managed to reach Switzerland. Thus he became the first member of 'X' Troop to return to Britain.

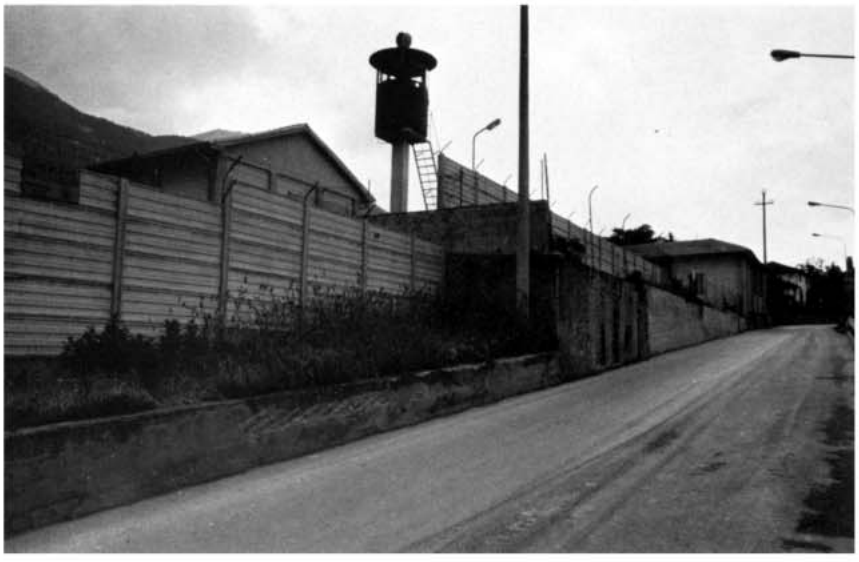
Meanwhile, back at Sulmona, Jowett had escaped too. Helped over the wall by Sergeants Clements and Lawley, he managed one train journey towards Switzerland, but was recaptured while changing to another train. For their part, the sergeants and men of 'X' Troop worked on a tunnel for three months and it had already progressed some 172 feet when it was discovered.

With the Italian capitulation in September 1943, the camp was without guards for a few days and several prisoners took the chance to flee before the Germans arrived to take over. Sergeants Clements and Lawley, after a gruelling four-weeks' march south through the mountains, reached Allied lines on October 13. Lance-Corporal Boulter joined a group of Italian partisans and fought with them for nine months before being recaptured and imprisoned in Germany.

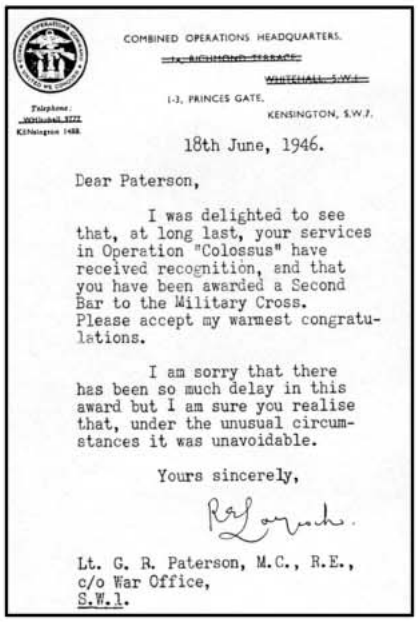
Soon after they occupied Italy, the Germans started transporting PoWs from Italy to camps in Germany. During the transport, Lieutenant Paterson jumped his train, joined Italian partisans and fought with them with distinction before escaping to Switzerland. At SOE's request, he later returned for a second tour with the guerillas. The rest of 'X' Troop remained in German captivity until the war's end.

Left: **Shortly after arriving at Sulmona, the 'X' Troop prisoners were visited by a representative of the International Red Cross who came to check how they were being treated and took this picture in the Other Ranks compound. The group photo includes five of the crew of Whitley 'S' for Sugar, the one bomber that was shot down on the raid. Back row, from left: Lance-Corporal Jim Maher, Sergeant John Walker, Sergeant Observer Harry Meddings (RAF), Lance-Corporal Doug Jones, Corporal Philip Julian, Lance-Corporal Harry Tomlin, Sapper Glyn Pryor, Lance-Corporal Harry Pexton, Sapper David Struthers, Corporal J. Grice, Sergeant Arthur Lawley, Sergeant Pilot Fred Southam (RAF), Lance-Corporal Douglas Henderson. Middle row, from left: Sapper R. Davidson, Private James Parker, Lance-Corporal Robert Watson, Sapper Alan Ross, Green (RAF — not on Operation 'Colossus'), Sergeant Edward Durie, Sergeant Percy Clements, Private Albert Samuels, Sapper Owen Phillips, Private Ernest Humphrey. Bottom row, from left: Sergeant Joe Shutt, Corporal Peter O'Brien, Sergeant Eric Hodges (RAF), Sergeant Basil Albon (RAF), Private Nicol Nastri, Corporal Derry Fletcher and Sapper A. Parker. Missing from the picture, apart from the officers, are Lance-Corporal Harry Boulter and Driver 'Jock' Crawford. Both men were in hospital, Boulter with a broken ankle and Crawford with an arm wound sustained during the gunfight of Jowett's escape party with its Italian captors. (Airborne Forces Museum)** *Right:* **Karel took this comparison shot of Italian Army trucks parked in front of the old huts through a side gate of the Fonte d'Amore compound. Later, when talking to the officer in charge at the main gate, he was told photography was prohibited although, rather incongruously, there was no objection to the taking of pictures from the mountain overlooking the compound!**





The spot where Captain Lea and Lieutenant Deane-Drummond made their escape attempt in the evening of December 8, 1941. Due to the change in ground level at this point, there was a break in the three wire fences outside the wall. Posing as electricians (their escape route is indicated on the camp plan) and pretending to replace a bulb on the light pole here with a makeshift ladder, the two men climbed up the wall, unscrewed the bulb and, using the cross wall as a bridge, inched across the wire fences. They made it to the other side but, when they tried to pull the ladder across, the nearest sentry became suspicious and opened fire. Both men jumped down, Lea being hit in the leg and unable to continue (he was in hospital for two weeks), but Deane-Drummond managing to get away. On the loose for three days, he made it to within a few miles of the Swiss border before being recaptured by an Italian patrol. Deane-Drummond eventually did escape from Italy in June 1942.



COMBINED OPERATIONS HEADQUARTERS.

~~1A, RICHMOND TERRACE,~~

~~WHITEHALL, S.W.1.~~

1-3, PRINCES GATE.

KENSINGTON, S.W.7.

~~Telephone: WHItehall 3772~~
~~KENsington 1488~~

18th June, 1946.

Dear Paterson,

I was delighted to see that, at long last, your services in Operation "Colossus" have received recognition, and that you have been awarded a Second Bar to the Military Cross. Please accept my warmest congratulations.

I am sorry that there has been so much delay in this award but I am sure you realise that, under the unusual circumstances it was unavoidable.

Yours sincerely,

R. J. Laycock.

Lt. G. R. Paterson, M.C., R.E.,
c/o War Office,
S.W.1.

In view of the courage involved in this daring and pioneering raid, it is surprising that only nine members of 'X' troop received awards for their part in it: Pritchard received the DSO; Paterson, Deane-Drummond, Lea and Jowett the MC; Clements, Lawley, Durie and Watson the MM. In addition, Daly, Maher and Nastri were mentioned in despatches. Boulter was also awarded the MM, but not for the raid but for his time with the Italian partisans. The awards could not be made while the men were still prisoners-of-war and, in the event, were not made until June 20, 1946. Lieutenant Paterson, who had led the actual demolition of the aqueduct, received this congratulatory letter *(left)* **from Major-General R. E. Laycock, the Chief of Combined Operations 1943-1945. (Courtesy of G. R. Paterson)** *Above:* **In 1982, Norman Kershaw, who had flown as a wireless operator in the Whitley piloted by Flight Lieutenant Walter Williams (he stands on the left in the picture on page 12), and who is blind after a later wartime crash, visited the Airborne Forces Museum at Aldershot with his old skipper and some 'X' Troop veterans. Posing in front of the museum's Dakota are, from left: Phil Julian, Harry Pexton, Doug Jones, Norman Kershaw, Major G. Norton (the museum's curator), Walter Williams, Percy Clements and Jim Maher. (Airborne Forces Museum)**

RESULTS

So what was the result of Operation 'Colossus', Britain's first paratroop raid? Strategically, the destruction of the Tragino aqueduct had very little effect on the war either in Albania or North Africa. The aqueduct was repaired within two-and-a-half days, well before the local reservoirs were dry. The side effects in Italy itself, however, were immense. Alarm and consternation spread across the whole of Italy, and it was quite some time before the Italians were sure that they had rounded up all parachutists. To counter public unrest, the Italian propaganda tried to make light of the raid, calling it 'a complete failure', but in official circles, the raid was considered to have introduced a serious new threat to the country. Stringent air raid and anti-parachute precautions were announced. Extra guards were posted at strategic objects and the whole district around Monte Vulture was barred to neutrals.

On February 14, the Italian official agency Stefani issued a statement that British paratroops had landed, admitting that 'a certain amount of damage was done' but claiming that all raiders had been rounded up. The sensational news was widely reported in the British press, although the War Office refused to confirm it or even admit the existence of paratroops. Only on the 20th, under pressure from the publicity, did it release a short, guarded report about the raid.

The War Office's caution was understandable since exact news of the raid's results was initially very difficult to obtain. Reconnaissance photographs taken on February 12, 36 hours after the raid, did not show any damage to either of the two aqueducts and, for quite some time, it was assumed that 'X' Troop had failed to accomplish its mission. Nobody could really explain the failure and, in his report of February 13, Wing Commander Norman put forward that either the raid had been expected and the entire troop been overwhelmed immediately on landing, or that the aqueduct had proved to be of an entirely different design and could not be destroyed with the equipment at hand. First indications that the raid had been successful after all came on February 24, through diplomatic channels, from the US attaché in Rome, who then later secured permission to actually speak to the parachutists at Sulmona. Details of this latter conversation arrived on March 14 through the correspondent of the *Chicago Daily News* who had just been expelled from Rome. Definite confirmation came only on October 4 through a coded message from Pritchard in one of his letters home. It was only when Deane-Drummond arrived back in Britain in August 1942 that a more detailed account could be compiled.

Important lessons were learned for future airborne operations. Prime among them was the necessity for earlier photographic reconnaissance of targets. Procedures for dropping on an objective at night had proved to take much longer than anticipated. The inadequacy of the container release gear and the need for better container design were realised. The news that the army possessed parachute troops attracted thousands of volunteers to the new arm. Thus, the 'Guinea-Pigs' laid the foundations for the much larger airborne operations later in the war.

On March 17, 1990 — 'Tragino Day' — a reunion of 'X' Troop veterans was held at Ringway on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Parachute Regiment at which a scale model of the target of Britain's first-ever paratroop raid was presented to Manchester Airport. Lining up behind the model are, from left: Major-General Tony Deane-Drummond, Phil Julian, actor Richard Todd (who joined the Parachute Regiment much later — see *After the Battle* No. 5), Judge Christopher Lea, David Struthers, Harry Pexton and Percy Clements. (Airborne Forces Museum)

SPIGOT MORTAR PIT AT ST ALBANS

By Fred Nash

On May 14, 1940, Anthony Eden, the newly-appointed Secretary of State for War, broadcast to the British people on the BBC Home Service:

'I want to speak to you tonight about the form of warfare which the Germans have been employing so extensively against Holland and Belgium — namely the dropping of parachute troops behind the main defensive lines. . . . In order to leave nothing to chance, and to supplement from sources as yet untapped the means of defence already arranged, we are going to ask you to help us in a manner which I know will be welcome to thousands of you. Since the war began the government have received countless inquiries from all over the Kingdom from men of all ages who are, for one reason or another, not at present engaged in military service, and who wish to do something for the defence of their country. Well, now is your opportunity. We want large numbers of such men in Great Britain, who are British subjects, between the ages of 17 and 65 . . . to come forward now and offer their services. . . . The name of the new Force which is now to be raised will be the "Local Defence Volunteers". . . . This name describes its duties in three words. . . . This is . . . a part-time job, so there will be no need for any volunteer to abandon his present occupation. . . . When on duty you will form part of the armed forces. . . . You will not be paid, but you will receive a uniform and will be armed. . . . In order to volunteer, what you have to do is to give in your name at your local police station; and then, as and when we want you, we will let you know.'

That Tuesday evening, thousands of volunteers appeared at their local police stations, in some cases before Eden had even finished speaking. The response overwhelmed the authorities and, within the first 24 hours, more than a quarter of a million men had registered.

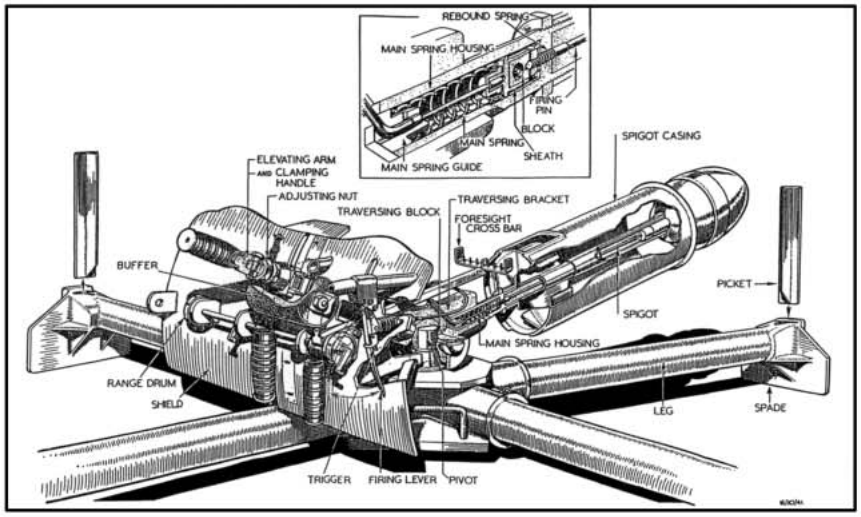
Initially, 'uniforms' were simply civilian attire with the addition of a khaki armband — the brassard — embroidered with the letters LDV. However, the title 'LDV' lasted barely two months before a change, initiated in a broadcast by Churchill on July 14, was made to 'Home Guard'.

After Dunkirk, there was a severe shortage of weaponry, even for the Regular Army, so it was not until a shipment of ex-WWI rifles arrived from America that the Home Guard was slowly able to dispense with the pikes, staffs and broomsticks which — possibly unfairly — epitomised the early days.

Ex-First World War Lewis guns, Browning Automatic Rifles and grenade launcher adapters added to the Home Guard's armoury, slowly being uniformed in battle-dress and steel helmets, but it was not until the spring of 1942 that the force received its first real means of destroying tanks.

The Blacker Bombard — later named the Spigot Mortar — was an unusual weapon (the principle of which was later adopted for the man-portable Projector, Infantry, Anti Tank, better known by its acronym 'PIAT'). Named after its inventor, Lieutenant-Colonel L. V. S. Blacker, it was basically a heavy mortar developed primarily to knock out armour, but equally at home as an anti-personnel weapon. Unusually, it had no barrel as such — the projectile being plugged onto a spigot, or firing pin, which hurled it several hundred yards, whereupon it exploded, hopefully obliterating

Top: **A Spigot Mortar located outside the Two Diamonds public house at the northern end of the High Street in Stevenage, Hertfordshire. This picture shows a Home Guard exercise in July 1942 — note the 'dead body' in the background.** *Above:* **When Fred Nash visited the spot to take this comparison, he found that the mortar crew must have faced the weapon westwards merely for the camera as it was obviously sited to project its missile down the street towards approaching enemy troops or tanks.**



According to the Small Arms Training manual (Volume 1, Pamphlet No. 23), the 29mm Spigot Mortar in a fixed position required three men for its operation but if mobility was required, a further two men were needed. The rate of fire was normally eight rounds per minute for the 14lb anti-personnel bomb, dropping to six per minute for the 20lb anti-tank missile. The latter would take just over a second to hit a target at 100 yards, or around 8½ seconds to travel to its maximum range of 485 yards. The lighter bomb could be fired almost double the distance.

everything in the vicinity. The gun crews reading the instruction manual were no doubt filled with enthusiasm on learning that fire should be withheld until the last moment, the ideal range to hit a moving tank being 75–100 yards!

The mortar could fire, or launch, two types of bomb. The 14lb projectile was primarily for anti-personnel use and could be hurled over 750 yards with a killing circle of a hundred yards radius from the point of impact. The 20lb bomb, on the other hand, while having a maximum range of around 450 yards, was designed for use against armour or pillboxes.

There were two main options for deploying the mortar. It could be fired in the open from a prone position or it could be sited in its own purpose-made weapons pit, which offered a measure of both concealment and protection. Although basically of similar design, spigot mortar pits varied from a hole in the ground with a central mound on which to mount the gun, to the most sophisticated kind: the specially designed and constructed concrete pit. The standard pattern was hexagonal, 9 feet across and 3 feet deep with a 3-foot diameter cylindrical 'pedestal' standing in the middle fitted with a 4-inch stainless steel pintle. Around the sides of the pit were four ammunition alcoves and a short brick-built trench was used as an infantry firing position.

In operation, the Blacker Bombard was fixed onto the pedestal using the pintle as a locating pin. The crew of three, reasonably protected from all sides by the pit, could traverse the gun on its pintle through a full 360 degrees and achieve a high measure of accuracy firing over measured ranges.

Each town had its Home Guard unit which, it was hoped, would hold up the German advance until help from the Regular Army could arrive. Defences were normally erected on the approach roads into towns and a Spigot Mortar would typically be sited to cover a 'choke' point — a bridge or narrow road where tanks could only advance in single file.

Nowadays, very few Spigot Mortar pits survive. Some of the central pedestals still remain intact, sitting as half-buried circles of concrete by the roadside, but the pits with their alcoves, hexagonal sides and brick-built trenches have long since fallen in or been demolished. Around St Albans, in Hertfordshire, I thought that most of the old Home Guard defences had all been cleared as there were no pillboxes left, no anti-tank obstacles and certainly no spigot mortar pits. That is, until now.

In November 1991, a small ad appeared in my local paper: 'Archaeological Surveyor required to undertake a survey of WWII defensive works (mainly pillboxes and anti-tank obstacles) for Hertfordshire County Council.' Was I dreaming? I checked the date — no, it was not April 1st. I had no background in archaeology, but as a life-long enthusiast of military history with a particular interest in World War II home defences since reading Henry Wills' book *Pillboxes* (see *After the Battle* No. 14), this just had to be the job of a lifetime!

Well — cutting out the nerve-racking bit — I got the job. It transpired that there was a growing realisation within the county that the Second World War defences, built just 50 years ago, were steadily disappearing under new roads and housing developments and that perhaps some of them ought to be preserved. What was needed was a study to find out where they all were, to visit each site, to record its type and construction, to analyse its positioning and purpose, to photograph it and to write up all the details as a proper and permanent archaeological record. The scope of the survey was to cover pillboxes, anti-tank obstacles, loopholes and Spigot Mortar bases and also include the recording of defences that had already been demolished.

Publicity about the project in the local press and a news item on Anglia TV brought in a fat postbag of information from all over the county — from enthusiasts, historians, ex-members of the Home Guard and all kinds of people.

During the next five months, I pored over maps endlessly, studied aerial photographs, interviewed people who had written to us, and tramped, scurried and crawled my way through the fields, woods and hedgerows of Hertfordshire. The final score was 207 sites. Most of these were the pillboxes and anti-tank obstacles of the Outer London Defence Ring, stretching in a continuous 25-mile line from Cheshunt in the east to Rickmansworth in the west. Next came the airfield defences — Hunsdon, Sawbridgeworth, Radlett — and finally the Home Guard town defences like those in Hitchin, Bishop's Stortford and Welwyn Garden City.

Pillboxes came in all shapes and sizes from the brick-built Type 22s, hexagonal Type 24s and magnificent Type 27s, to the giants of Hunsdon and a two-man mini at Watford. Anti-tank obstacles ranged from the massive complex of 85 concrete blocks choking a road/river/rail intersection at Cheshunt to the handfuls of 'conicles' in the country lanes around Welwyn.

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HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENT
COUNTY ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD


6908:SPIGOT MORTAR BASE, ALLOTMENTS TO THE W OF ST. ALBANS
DISTRICT: St.Albans
PARISH: St. Albans City
NGR: TL 1408 0787  MAP NO: TL10NW,67/695  HEIGHT O.D. 100m.  AREA:   0.0 ha.
CONDITION: Very good     SURVIVAL: Complete
FORM: Other Structure
PERIOD: Modern

REMARKS:      Spigot Mortar pit <1> standing on high ground commanding the
              wide valley to the S and W, discovered under concrete slabb-
              ing in May 1992.  After excavation it was found to be in
              almost perfect condition - complete with octagonal sides,
              alcoves, domed pedestal and trench.  As the site is due for
              imminent redevelopment the Nat. Army Mus. and Imp. War Mus.
              were approached with a view to its removal and preservation.
              At 18.6.92 the NAM have declined and IWM intend to take the
              centre pedestal only.  See primary record and documents <2>
AUTHORITIES: <1> H Wills: Pillboxes, 1985, p 69
             <2> FWN (HCC) site visit, 14.5.92 & 28.5.92


ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY:

S.A.M.:
SITE STATUS:                                AREA STATUS:
LAND CLASS ON SITE: (5) Allotment)
LAND CLASS AROUND SITE: (5) Allotment
SITE MANAGEMENT: Under redevlopment

GENERIC TYPE: 3430: Spigot Mortar Base
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It was in November 1991 that Fred Nash applied for and landed the job of documenting all the Second World War defence sites in Hertfordshire. Each position was photographed and listed, this facsimile from the computer listing being the Spigot Mortar pit — the subject of this article.

In May 1992, Fred checked on a site in St Albans in the middle of an area being cleared in Folly Lane for the construction of a new housing estate. *Above left:* **This was how the carefully hidden mortar pit appeared when he first saw it with,** *right,* **a close-up of the tell-tale pin projecting through the paving.**

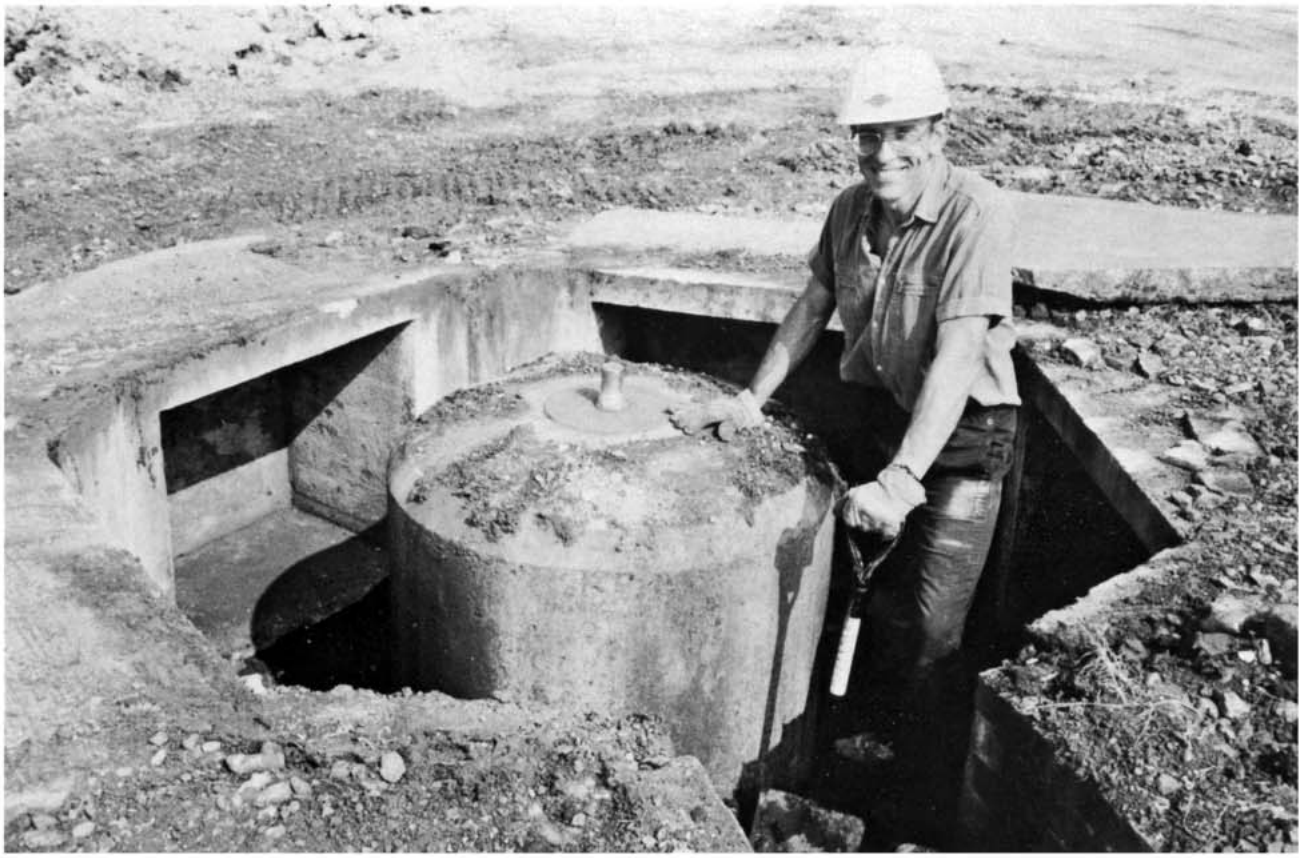
Towards the end of the project, I was asked to go and have a look at an odd concrete base which was being used as a datum point by contractors building a new housing estate on the outskirts of St Albans. Apparently, it had a strange stainless steel pin sticking out of it. . . . As soon as I saw it, I knew what it *looked* like as I had seen half a dozen of them around the county: it was clearly the pintle of a Spigot Mortar pedestal. It was geographically right — on top of a hill about 200 yards from the main Redbourn road into St Albans — but what was it doing sitting on a flat bed of concrete instead of the domed top of a pedestal? Actually, the concrete looked more like paving stones.

It seems silly now, but it must have been ten minutes before it dawned on me. I had walked about 20 yards across the site and climbed a pile of earth. Looking back from this distance it suddenly hit me. I had been standing right on top of the answer and could not see it. The paving stones were shaped in a hexagon with a single L-shaped line of them leading off to the side . . . it was a covered-over Spigot Mortar pit, probably sealed off immediately after the war as a safety measure! It was also a sure bet that the pedestal, alcoves, etc. were all exactly as on the day they were sealed.

The first thing to do was to make sure that one of the big earth-movers on the site did not go through the top of it — naturally I was thinking of the damage to the pit rather than the earth-mover! I went down to the site office and saw the foreman. Telling him what I thought it was, I suggested that as I couldn't guarantee that there were no live bombs still in the pit, it might be a good idea if the site vehicles gave it a wide berth.

The next thing was to see if it was possible to stop it being destroyed to make way for a nice

Excavation of the pit took place two weeks later on May 28. Fred was on hand to take further pictures and clean out the interior.



Quite justifiably, Fred looks quite pleased with the day's work — his enthusiasm tempered only with the knowledge that the beautifully preserved remains were soon to be bulldozed into oblivion.

semi-detached house. Although the contractors themselves were extremely sympathetic, and the plans were checked to see if it fell between the buildings and could be saved, by sheer bad luck it was located slap-bang in the middle of a house — in fact at the bottom of someone's stairs. It was also too late to think about preservation orders — these things have to be planned years in advance — and our Spigot Mortar pit was going to be demolished in about a month.

Having not solved the preservation problem, it was clearly time to see what I had actually found. A few days later, on a sunny day in May, an archaeologist from St Albans museum and I arrived to unveil the pit. The contractors had kindly lent us a HyMac and driver and one by one the capping stones were lifted. It became immediately obvious that this was a real find. The pit was virtually perfect. As the last stone came off we could see the alcoves, crisp and clean as the day the concrete was poured. Although some soil had fallen in over the years, the floor of screeded concrete had not deteriorated in any way. Standing up in the middle was the pedestal, 3 feet high, of smooth concrete surmounted by the stainless steel pintle. The trench, which had been slightly damaged by the HyMac, was partially filled with soil but the brickwork itself was in good condition. We spent the next couple of hours happily digging out the soil, photographing and measuring.

We made two odd discoveries. At the bottom of the trench, in the corner of the L-shape, a small section of the floor had been broken up and filled with rubbish. It now seems likely that the original builders omitted to put in a soakaway drain and the wartime inhabitants decided to correct this with the liberal use of a pick!

The other find was even stranger. Whilst digging out the soil, we came across some Roman pottery remains. Now this is by no means unusual in St Albans, which is the old Roman town of Verulamium, but what was unusual was that each of them was neatly marked with identification numbers and the date '1962'! Quite how they arrived there we haven't the faintest idea, but at least I now felt more like a real archaeologist!

With its demolition imminent, my last plan was to try and get it removed piecemeal for preservation somewhere else. The idea was to cut it up into manageable sections which could be reconstructed on a suitable museum site — the only Spigot Mortar pit on display to the public in the country — and over the next couple of weeks I contacted and sent photographs to the various national military museums. Initially, they showed some interest but, in the end, all efforts came to nothing. I had to accept that time had run out and I could not prevent it being demolished. Finally, I had to say goodbye.

Thus, possibly the finest known example of a Blacker Bombard mortar pit was destroyed. I could not face going back to see it bulldozed into the ground — not even for an *After the Battle* photograph — but in December 1992 I returned to picture the spot where it had stood as a final comparison. That in itself was bad enough.

While St Albans is steeped in the history of the Roman conquest of Britain, sadly it proved impossible to preserve a defence work built to protect the town from a more recent invasion. Fred went back one last time in December 1992 to take this comparison to go with the picture at the top of the page opposite. The mortar pit stood at the bottom of the stairs of the house standing on plot 21 — the one on the extreme right.

FIRST BASE POST OFFICE — APO 640

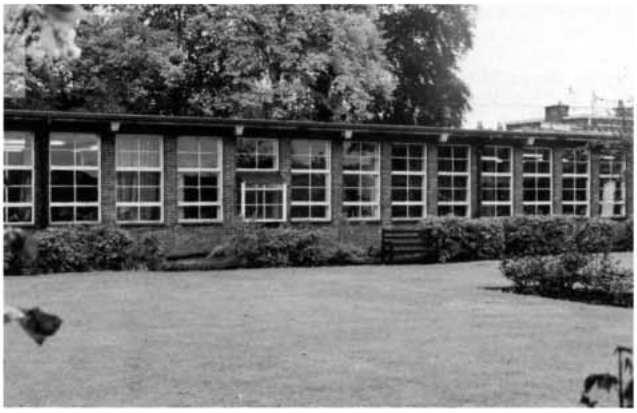
By Martin and Fran Collins

On June 16, 1942, three officers and 32 enlisted men disembarked from the SS *Tegelberg* at Liverpool Docks. They were the first contingent of the postal unit that was to set up its base in the Midlands and become the 1st Base Post Office serving the men and women of the US forces in Britain, North Africa and, eventually, Europe. The unit left Lime Street Station in Liverpool the following day for Lichfield where the men were billeted at Whittington Barracks (see *After the Battle* No. 27) for a fortnight until more permanent billets were prepared for them.

On June 30, the men were moved to Sutton Coldfield and billeted in the uncompleted buildings of Holland Road School. Construction of the building had started in 1939 but had been halted by the outbreak of war. When the party arrived, the school was just an empty shell with wings but no rooms or partitions for classrooms. Therefore it was necessary to convert the interior into sleeping quarters, offices and a mess hall. In August, the group was swelled by the arrival of 19 extra men and, from October onwards, the unit expanded further as more personnel arrived.

Meanwhile, on July 1, the 1st Base Post Office (1st BPO) had officially begun operations. The first building to be used was an old railway shed on a side track of the LMS Railway near Sutton Park Railway Station, a building which still stands today and is little changed. Francis Sullivan, one of the enlisted men, described it as 'an abandoned building which was poorly lit with no toilet facilities'. Temporary 'Johns' were erected outside the

The US military post office comes to Britain. The initial contingent destined to set up the 1st Base Post Office was accommodated in Whittington Barracks at Lichfield, Staffordshire, but the men were soon moved some ten miles to the south to Sutton



Coldfield which had been chosen as the centre of US military postal operations for the ETO. The men were billeted in the uncompleted school situated in Holland Road. *Left:* **Then, Holland Road Barracks; now, Plantsbrook Comprehensive School.**

building and one of the less popular duties was emptying the five-gallon 'honey' buckets by hand, carrying them down to the railway station. Some of the enlisted men found that wearing a gas mask made this job easier!

At this early stage in the Post Office's existence, the men had to work a ten or twelve hour day at the depot and then carry out training activities in the evenings.

On August 1, 1942, the number '640' came into being as the APO number for the 1st BPO, and henceforth all mail addressed to American personnel in Sutton featured this number. Birmingham Z, which was the name of the railway spur near the station where railway wagons were shunted off for unloading, became the telephone code for the base and on ringing the office in Birmingham to give information on the dispatching and receipt of mail, this code had to be given.

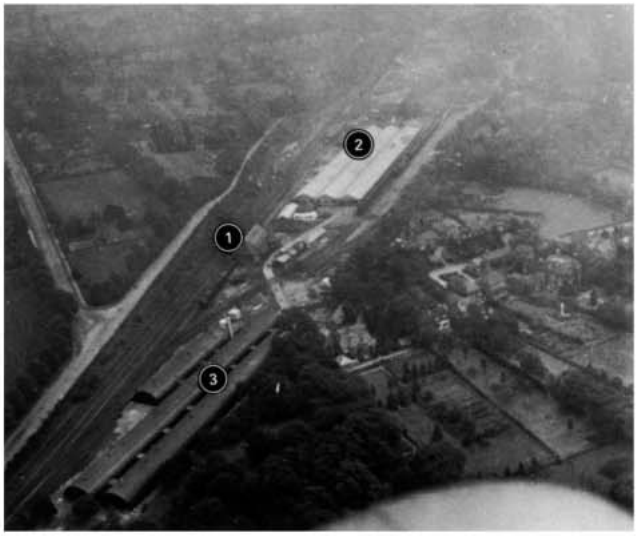
The function of the Post Office was primarily to dispatch all mail coming in from the States to the Army Post Offices that were based around the country which served the American military bases in Britain. All mail from the troops would be routed through the 1st BPO via the APOs. This simple system became complicated if APO numbers were not specified in the soldier's mailing address. This was often because of ignorance of the number on behalf of the writer or because of confusion between the GI's APO number, regiment number, division number or serial number. To further complicate matters, all soldiers were given temporary APO numbers on leaving the States. On reaching his new base, the soldier was then given a new APO number, so the temporary number was yet another one to further confuse friends and relatives writing from home. Post was also often misdirected because of the problem of units being moved around the country, and thus changing their APO designations, and from D-Day onwards the problem of locating individuals became much worse as soldiers were missing in action or hospitalised.

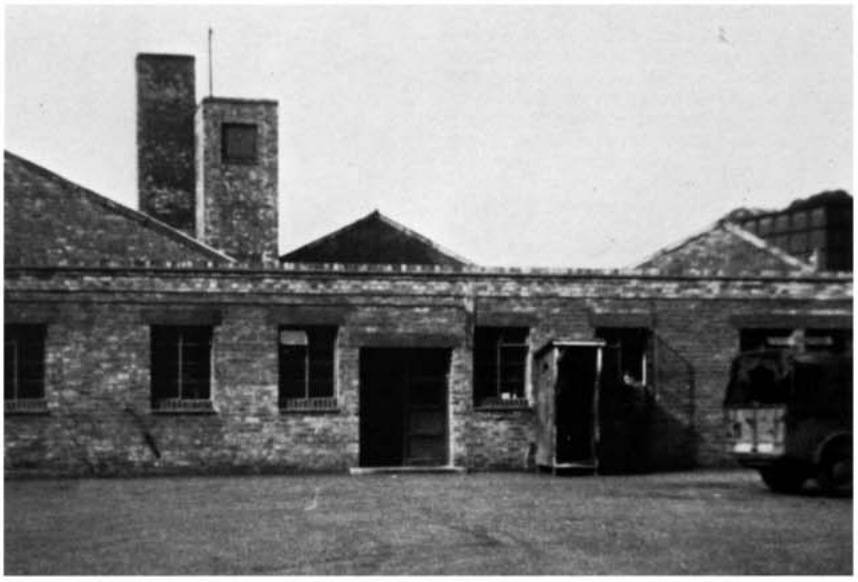
The Scheme Locater Section was therefore brought into being at the Base Post Office and this section was responsible for plotting the movement of troops and directing the mail to them. The Directory Section was also established to record the location of each serviceman. Each American soldier had a card in the file which gave his name, serial number and unit affiliation. These were filed alphabetically. Every time a new American division with its support troops arrived in Britain it was necessary for around 20,000 new cards to be filed in the directory. The Directory Section was begun on a small scale to handle the mail of the small number of troops in Britain at the time, but over the next three and a half years it was to expand to assume gigantic proportions. In 1944, convoys carrying thousands of troops arrived every week which meant that tens of thousands of new cards had to be filed.

The first building taken over by the 1st Base Post Office was a small railway shed alongside a siding at Sutton Park Railway Station.

The original building is now used by the Royal Mail although our author, Martin Collins, comments that it was not possible to take the exact view today because of the growth of trees. The railway spur has been dismantled.

The increasing workload necessitated the employment of civilian women (this advertisement appeared in the *Sutton News*) and the addition of further working space. To the original railway shed [1] was added the purpose-designed buildings [2] and the extended quonset hutting [3] for use by the Directory Section set up to keep track of each American serviceman in Europe.





The new buildings were erected south-east of the first shed and comprised some 52,000 square feet as well as having a 380-foot-long platform alongside the railway siding. They were inspected by the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester in January 1943.

As operations increased, the Base Post Office soon outgrew the small railway shed, and the unit moved to a larger purpose-built sorting office on an adjoining site in October 1942 although the building was not yet completed. The central heating was not operational until December and this, coupled with the lack of heat in the unfinished barracks, led to a high sickness rate. The lighting in the sorting office building was also not completed until March the following year.

To help deal with the increasing workload, in October 1942 it was found necessary to advertise for civilian workers. Local housewives were urged to apply for this 'real war job' and, as all unmarried women and childless widows were liable for drafting into the military service or war work, so hundreds of local women applied for jobs at the US Base Post Office. However, much to the women's regret, they were not paid the same wages as the Americans as the pay agreement came under the Lend-Lease Act and was subject to British Government control.

The Post Office workers were honoured with the visits of several high-ranking officers to inspect the morale-boosting work carried out there. On January 14, 1943, the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester came to Sutton Coldfield, the GIs amazed to see that the Duke was wearing a military uniform instead of some sort of regal attire!

On Sunday, September 27, 1992, fifty years since 'Birmingham Z' became a wartime postal depot, Royal Mail International organised a reunion to celebrate the occasion. Local people who worked there during and after the war and former GPO staff were joined by a party of Americans, including ex-Sergeant Henry Brown in uniform.

They found the interior of the quonsets largely unchanged, save for the modernisation of the lighting.

A plaque was unveiled by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor Peter Barwell on the main office wall — the same room used during the war by the American commander of the 1st Base Post Office, Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Hartigan.

As more troops were drafted to work at the Base Post Office, the Holland Road Barracks became full and alternative accommodation had to be sought. Large houses were requisitioned for officers and it was decided to billet the longer serving enlisted men in private homes. Messing centres were built in different parts of Sutton and householders who had spare bedrooms in the vicinity of the messing centres were told to expect their guests. The hosts were to be paid one shilling per day for each GI billeted on them. The billeting system was an enforced one, and at first was not met with much enthusiasm by Sutton's householders although in time most of the GIs settled down well in their new 'homes', often taking the place of the 'older son' or 'uncle' in the family. Many of Sutton's billeters still correspond with American friends today.

The end of 1943 and the beginning of 1944 saw the peak of operations at the Base Post Office with even more accommodation being required to billet those men who were working there on a casual basis. As a result, several camps were built on the outskirts of Sutton.

In April 1944, the remainder of the enlisted men were moved from the barracks at the Holland Road School to billets in the community to make way for the imminent arrival of a detachment from the Women's Army Corps. Certain alterations were made to the school to make it fit for the 'lady soldiers' and when finished it was said to be the 'finest WAC camp in the world' with 'the most attractive PX in the European Theater of Operations'. The WACs gradually took over the jobs of the GIs who were being sent to Tidworth Barracks to retrain for combat.

In February 1945, the 6888th Postal Battalion consisting of 686 black enlisted women and 24 black officers arrived in Birmingham and were attached unassigned to the 1st BPO until the end of May when they were shipped out to Rouen, France. This unit was the largest group of black women to come to England during the Second World War. The 6888th Postal Battalion worked and lived in the old

Centre: **In spite of the provision of the additional buildings, the workload was such that the GIs were forced to work outside in the yard for lack of sufficient space inside.** *Right:* **It is certainly unusual, particularly in this day and age, to find temporary wartime buildings still in use — all the more so that they are still being used for the same purpose for which they were originally constructed.**

Left: **Dozens of local women were already employed at the base and in 1944 members of the Womens' Army Corps were drafted in to help replace GIs posted out to combat units. Inevitably, romances developed, one of the loveliest stories concerning that between Captain Jordan and Natalie Pike who were married at Holy Trinity Church in July 1945** *(right).*

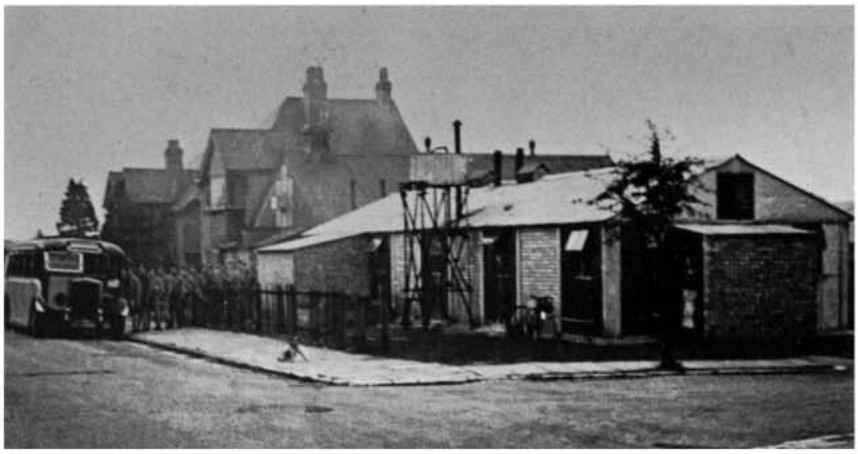
King Edwards School in Moseley, Birmingham and although they came under the auspices of the 1st Base Post Office, they had little occasion to come to Sutton and were segregated from the white GIs and WACs.

Because of the nature of the job, it was rare that men were given lengthy leave so all spare time was spent around Sutton and the neighbouring Warwickshire villages. As Leonard McDermott (one of the enlisted men) remembers, the men became adept at making the most of what free time they could secure, be it a weekend, a Sunday or an occasional afternoon. Most of the pubs in Sutton Coldfield became popular and as Art Johnson says: 'Meeting the people of Sutton was best accomplished by attending the various pubs'. Unfortunately, relationships between the English and the Americans sometimes became a little strained leading to occasional fights. The two cinemas in Sutton, The Empress and The Odeon, were other leisure spots, Andrew Arden remembering that he enjoyed going to the movies as it helped him to forget about the war and about being far away from home.

Dances were popular in Sutton with the young people of both nationalities, and the dance halls in Sutton and Birmingham were usually full of those intent on having a good time. 'The Casino' in Birmingham held dances with a 'Big Band' every Monday afternoon which was convenient for those on the night shift who had to start work at 10.00 p.m.

Many Sutton girls went to the dances to meet the GIs and numerous romances developed in the town. These often led to marriage. In order to get married, permission had to be sought from Captain Frederick W. Jordan, the Personnel Officer at the 1st BPO. The men found his interviews fairly easy to get through as he asked questions like: 'Do you know what you are doing?' and 'Do you realise the responsibility of getting your wife back to the USA?'

The English girls were interviewed by Sutton's registrar, Miss Natalie Pike, and she was much harder to get past, asking questions like: 'Do you realise you will be just a plaything for the Americans until the war ends and then you will be left behind?' and 'What if your husband-to-be was sent into combat and got killed?' In some cases she withheld permission for the marriage. This infuriated Captain Jordan who soon got on the telephone to talk to her. Al Lucas, one of the enlisted men, says that it was general knowledge that the two of them were destroying the Anglo-American relations which so many of the GIs had been devoting their time to strengthening. As it was necessary for Miss Pike to meet Captain Jordan to sort out the paperwork, against all probability, this eventually led to them dating each other. On July 28, 1945, the man who had given everyone the idea that he was the 'typical confirmed bachelor' and the woman who had withheld permission for some of the would-be GI brides to get married, were themselves married! The original 32 enlisted men and other officer friends were invited to the wedding at Holy Trinity Church and reception afterwards at the Royal Hotel in Sutton.



Many other sites in the Sutton area were associated with the 1st BPO. This is the Four Oaks Messing Center in Cremorne Road, a scene reminiscent of so many others in towns throughout Britain during the later war period where every vacant plot seemed to be occupied by quarters of some sort or other.

In April 1944, the 17th Base Post Office (known as the 'Invasion Outfit') came to work alongside the 1st BPO. This unit had plans to move to the Continent shortly after D-Day, which came as no surprise to the majority of the postal workers who had been well aware of the build-up of troops in England through the increased amount of mail to process and extra names to file in the Directory Section.

Many of the GIs and WACs in Sutton saw the planes flying overhead in the early hours of June 6 as they formed into groups over the troop carrier airfields in the Midlands. Later in the day, they heard the news of the landings officially.

Although prior to D-Day most of the men were kept in the dark as to the exact details of the invasion plan, there were some officers who held the 'Bigot' security clearance and were thus privy to certain classified information on Operation 'Overlord'. Unfortunately, one of the 'Bigoted' officers of the 576th Postal Unit based in Sutton at the time disclosed the objectives of the US First Army to a member of the Adjutant General's Department (who was not privy to the plan). For this breach of security, he was convicted, dismissed from the service and sentenced to hard labour for one year at the US Disciplinary Barracks, Greenhaven, New York.

Shortly after D-Day, the 17th BPO moved to France and more postal GIs were sent to retrain for combat duties, being replaced by hospitalised GIs sent back from the front. Those working in the Directory Section were kept very busy during this time redirecting mail for injured and deceased personnel, it being essential that MIA or KIA mail was not sent back to the relatives until they had been informed officially of their loved one's death or disappearance.

From the spring of 1945 onwards, large groups of personnel, which included many of the WACs, moved over to Paris to set up the 'Base Post Office, France'. Meanwhile, back in Sutton, German prisoners-of-war were being set to work at the post office, and although some were detailed for manual labour such as loading and unloading vans and cleaning details at the sorting office and in the camps, the majority of them worked in the Directory Section.

Following VE-Day, those servicemen who held enough service points were sent back to the States which included most of the original 32 enlisted men, who had been overseas for three years. Only a skeleton staff was left in Sutton to wind up the operations. Holland Road Barracks closed in May 1945 and the 51 remaining WACs were posted to London. All the houses that had been occupied by the officers were derequisitioned, except for one, and the remaining enlisted men were moved out of their billets in the town and into Penns Lane Camp which was the only camp in the area to be retained by the US Army.

And this is the 1st BPO motor pool (note 'No AFVs') located approximately a mile from the depot. Eastcroft Garage in Coleshill Road still retains the same name although the original building has long gone.

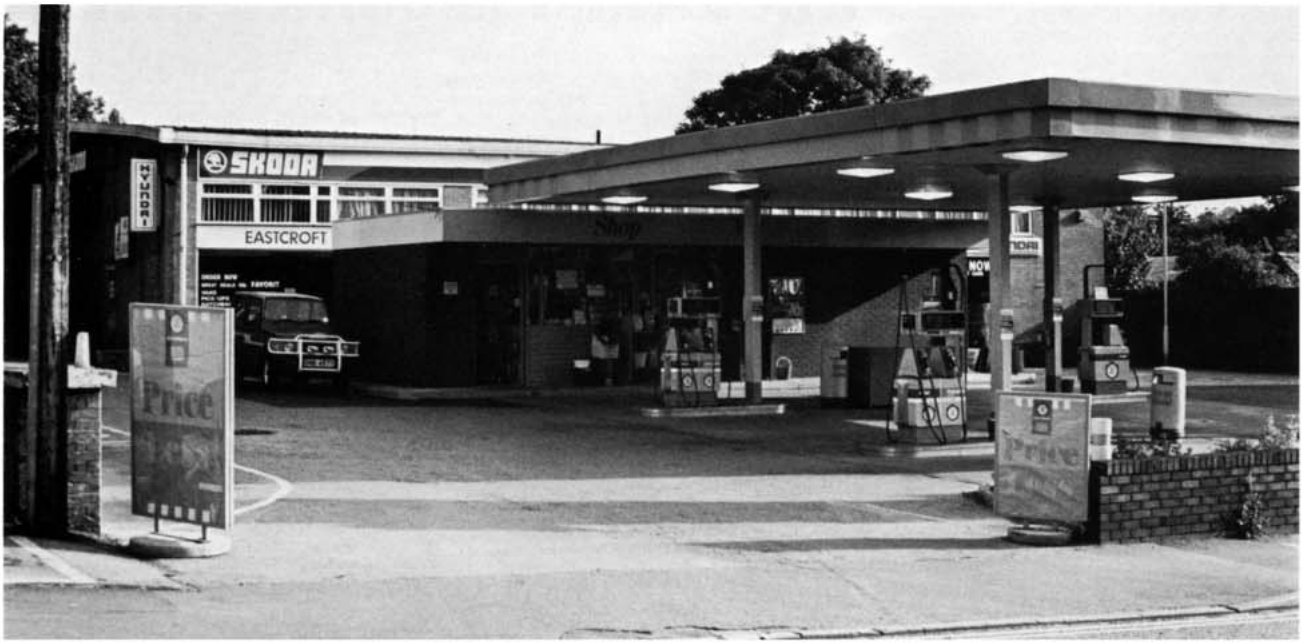
Immediately following VJ-Day, the redeployment programme for the troops was accelerated and more of the post office personnel were sent back to the States. In September, all the NCOs of the first three grades had earned enough points (85) to be placed on orders for return to the US. Consequently, discipline at the post office became difficult to uphold because of the lack of qualified postal personnel and NCOs of rank and experience.

Detachment B (the only one remaining out of the eight original detachments) officially ceased mail operations on November 15, 1945, although some post had been received late and the last official dispatch of two vans, one to London and one to Southampton, was made on the November 30. By December 10, no further mail was being received for Birmingham Z and orders came for Detachment B with one officer to move from Sutton Coldfield to Paris, spelling the final end of the 1st Base Post Office.

After being handed over to the British authorities, the buildings were left empty until 1947 when the British Army moved its Home Postal Centre from Nottingham to the old American depot which then became known as 'Base Army Post Office, Sutton Coldfield'. However, in 1948 the army left and the civilian General Post Office took over.

Royal Mail International are currently using the site as a Foreign Postal Depot. In 1992, the depot celebrated 50 years of postal service and a plaque was unveiled to commemorate its inauguration. Representatives returned to join in the celebrations from the five decades that the building had been in use, this group including five GIs and a WAC as well as many of the civilians who had worked there during the war years.

Martin and Fran Collins' new book Letters for Victory *is available from Brewin Books, Doric House, Church Street, Studley, Warks, B80 7LG. Price £10.95 (plus postage).*



MISSING, PRESUMED KILLED

By Dilip Sarkar

The River Severn rises at its source high in the Welsh hills, rushing along its upper reaches into Shropshire until sedately meandering through Worcestershire and its cathedral city, downstream becoming tidal at Gloucester. Thereafter the river soon develops into an estuary, joined by the River Wye, before discharging into the Bristol Channel. The Severn estuary is amongst the most dangerous in the world, respected and feared by both fishermen and sailors. During the Second World War its tidal reaches were to claim the bodies of a number of Allied airmen.

To the east of the estuary was RAF Aston Down, in Gloucestershire, a busy station and home of a Spitfire Operational Training Unit, originally numbered 5, later becoming 52. As with all OTUs, the rate of attrition from training accidents was often high. Every fledgling fighter pilot at Aston Down was issued with a copy of the 'OTU Handbook', which has the following to say of accidents:

'Every term at OTU most of the avoidable accidents are directly attributable to bad discipline on the part of pupils. These acts range from disobedience of the Flying Instructors' injunctions as to the minimum interval between aircraft to which pupils may close when practising attacks upon each other, to such less serious acts as taxying across grass temporarily prohibited as unserviceable on account of the risk of upturning aircraft. The consequence of such indiscipline is a recurring and wholly avoidable loss of life and equipment that can ill be spared.'

On the morning of Tuesday, January 26, 1943, young Payne from Church Farm, Redwick, Gwent, was walking a herd of cows along the sea wall. As the incoming tide lapped at the shore, the tranquil pastoral scene was rudely disturbed by the snarl of Merlins overhead, as Spitfires from 52 OTU attacked a drogue being towed over the Severn estuary. At 10.30 a.m., the Flight Commander gave Purple Section orders to attack the target. Sergeant H. Clarke, in Spitfire Mk IIb P8207, swung round over the estuary from the English side and closed in. As he did so, Sergeant Eldon Howard Caldwell in P8208 also made for the drogue from the Welsh coast, roaring over the sea wall at about 500 feet. Over the water the wings of the two Spitfires collided. Sergeant Clarke managed to retain control of his machine, and fifty years later Mr Payne recalled the damaged Spitfire flying away upriver, belching out black smoke, to make a safe forced landing on the shore at Magor. Sergeant Caldwell was not so lucky. P8208 spun in half a mile out to sea and disappeared under the waves. For the 22-year-old Canadian from Cardiston, Alberta, Canada, the estuary's cold and treacherous waters became his only grave.

The subsequent inquiry indicated that Sergeant Caldwell had arrived over Redwick early, receiving instructions to orbit and await his turn. Instead he attacked with the preceding section. Called again by the range control officer and once more told to await his turn, he again attacked at which point the collision occurred. Radio failure, however, was not ruled out.

Eldon Howard Caldwell was born on November 12, 1920, at Brocket, Alberta, Canada, and volunteered for aircrew training at Calgary, Alberta, on August 28, 1941. Thereafter he completed his elementary flying training in Canada before arriving in the UK during 1942 to fly more advanced types of service aircraft. On December 8, 1942, Sergeant Caldwell commenced his training at 52 OTU. The 21 survivors of No. 26 Course later passed out of Aston Down on February 9, 1943, three being posted overseas and the remainder to Spitfire squadrons in England. On August 19, 1943, however, the Air Ministry officially notified Sergeant Caldwell's parents that their son was now 'presumed' killed on active service.

There the story of Sergeant Caldwell and Spitfire P8208 may well have ended, had the crash site not been located by a now inactive aviation archaeological society in August 1984. The Merlin engine was still in situ with propeller assembly attached, and all other major components. Many of these items were recovered, but unfortunately nothing was done to preserve the Merlin. Indeed two members were apparently spotted using sledgehammers on the engine to facilitate access to the stainless steel items within for use as trophies. Initially, the other parts were displayed at a museum on an RAF station, but after this closed the former secretary passed all items into the care of the Malvern Spitfire Team in 1992.

My subsequent research indicated that Spitfire Mk IIb P8208 had been built at the Castle Bromwich Aircraft Factory and was one of a relatively small number of cannon armed Mk IIs built. Delivered to 12 MU on March 26, 1941, the Spitfire first served at RAF Northolt with 303 'Kosciusko' Squadron, a part of No. 1 Polish Fighter Wing, between May 5 and June 14, 1941. That period was the time of early offensive fighter operations, and P8208 was flown on a number of local training flights and bomber escorts over France by Group Captain Pawilkowski, Pilot Officers Paderewski, Wroblewski, Zak, Lapinski, and Sergeants Szlagowski and Giermer. All flights occurred without note, except on June 14, 1941, when P8208, flown by Pilot Officer Wroblewski, was part of an escort formation to bombers on Circus 12. During the return trip the Poles were attacked by four Bf 109s. One of the Poles fired back but without result.

Information was also received that since the war many people had visited the P8208 crash site, which was accessible on foot during periods of extreme low tides, and removed many other souvenirs. However, what gave cause for serious concern was that during the early 1980s human remains had possibly been discovered at the site and the appropriate authorities not informed.

Coincidentally, an old fishing friend of mine and former fellow police officer, Chris Carne, had since become a bailiff with the National Rivers Authority and was based at Chepstow in Gwent. As Redwick lay in his geographical area of responsibility, Chris was consulted regarding the spring tide dates, which would

Left: **The remains of the Rolls-Royce Merlin engine as first discovered in August 1984.** *Right:* **The tailwheel from Spitfire P8208 lay nearby, still attached to part of the framework of the fuselage. (Allen White)**

give the safest access to the site, and his professional experience enlisted to help plan a reconnaissance.

I then contacted Martin Hill at the Ministry of Defence (S10) and explained the situation, putting across the case that as Sergeant Caldwell's remains were possibly still present, and therefore vulnerable, the P8208 site did not fall within the spirit of the Protection of Military Remains Act, 1986, especially as it lay just 500 yards off shore and was accessible on foot. I suggested that a joint MoD/RAF/Malvern Spitfire Team operation should be mounted during the forthcoming low spring tide dates to make every effort to find the missing airman and clear the site. To this the Ministry of Defence agreed, and a visit was arranged with Flight Lieutenant 'Tex' Dallas and his RAF Aircraft Salvage Team, based at St Athan, for Monday, February 8, 1993. The help of honorary team-member, Peter Earp, was also enlisted to fly down in his Robinson helicopter with member Dr Dennis Williams and locate the wreckage from the air, then to direct the party on the ground.

On the day in question, members of the team met the RAF at lunchtime in Redwick's village inn. We quickly set about convincing Flight Lieutenant Dallas of the seriousness of our interest, and quality of work to date. In addition, we impressed upon him that, in respect of this particular project, the safety aspect had been accorded special priority, Chris Carne's professional and enthusiastic help in this sphere being invaluable.

By 1.30 p.m. on what was a dull and miserable February day, the party gathered on the sea wall, awaiting Chris's instructions to move out after the rapidly receding tide. Eventually we clambered down the wall and slithered our way across 100 yards of thick mud. Then came the difficult part: some 250 yards of quicksand which had the texture of jelly. It was a frightening experience, but, breathless, we eventually reached the hard shale some 500 yards out on which the Spitfire was believed to lie. A large section of spar was found, but then all eyes were skyward as the Robinson appeared, Peter actually landing on the shale. Quickly airborne, following a brief appraisal of the situation so far, minutes later Dennis, acting as observer in the aircraft, spotted a mainspar and undercarriage leg pointing skywards, just having been uncovered by the tide. The site, therefore, lay several hundred yards away from where the first spar was found.

We all quickly made our way to the helicopter, which was hovering just inches above the water. Soon the site was completely dry, and there it was: all that remained of Spitfire P8208. All fuselage skinning and framework had long disappeared, and components were strewn across a large area of the seabed. Tony Bramhall's metal detector gave a continuous note due to the large volume of metal present. The radiator was found and the main spar, broken into two halves, each with an undercarriage leg still attached, the chrome gleaming through those areas not encrusted with barnacles.

The sight that greeted Dennis Williams whilst hovering above the crash site in a Robinson helicopter in February 1993: a section of mainspar still with an undercarriage leg attached, being rapidly uncovered by the receding tide. Note the section of chrome oleo ram gleaming through in an area not barnacle encrusted. (Dr D. J. Williams)

Peter Earp's helicopter parked on the shale beside the wreckage. The sea-wall is half a mile away, there being several hundred yards of trecherous quicksand between the crash site and shore. (Andrew Long)

Following the introduction of the Protection of Military Remains Act in 1986, the Ministry of Defence has not granted licences for the inspection or recovery at any crash site where the pilot or crewmen remain missing. Any recoveries which fall into this category are now carried out by the RAF so the search for Sergeant Caldwell was unique in that it was the first time that the MoD/RAF have co-operated with any aircraft archaeology group to this extent. Although no human remains were recovered, and Eldon Caldwell is still listed as missing, the services of Bristow's S-76 helicopter enabled over 1,000 lbs of wreckage to be transported ashore. (Andrew Long)

The fuel tank and seat armour were found lying on top of the shale, but many other items were actually fossilising into the crust, and these had to be dug out. A rudder pedal soon came to the surface, and the bracket fitted adjacent to the reflector gunsight to accommodate spare bulbs. In this area 'Tex' and his men started digging furiously, assisted by team members, hoping that it would be the position where the cockpit had settled into the bed. Soon two bones were discovered. Meanwhile the vast amount of wreckage was placed in one great pile. The problem was that it was dangerous enough to cross the quicksand merely carrying a spade, so it was going to be almost impossible to return to the shore carrying the wreckage, some of which was extremely heavy. Peter managed to fly a small quantity back, but of course his helicopter was not powerful enough to lift any substantial items. With the emphasis firmly on safety, Chris soon gave the order for us to start making the long trek back to the sea wall.

The following day we made another visit to the site, the intention being for the team to help the RAF dig deeper in the hope of discovering the remains of Sergeant Caldwell. We were all disappointed, however, to learn from Flight Lieutenant Dallas that the RAF St Athan Medical Officer had identified the bones collected the previous day as being of animal origin. Another bone was subsequently found on the second search, but this too was later similarly identified.

Sergeant 'Tiny' Baelz, of the air force team, estimated the wreckage located at the site to weigh well over 1,000 lbs but it was impossible, with safety a paramount consideration, to consider negotiating the sand with heavy items. The original idea had been to take a boat out on the morning tide, anchor up over the wreck, and load up the wreckage when the boat became marooned by the receding water, and let it float off when the tide came back in. Unfortunately, having since visited the site, it was feared that the rough nature of the shale might damage the boat's bottom, so the only option was to somehow secure an airlift. The RAF's official interest in the project, however, only extended to recovering Sergeant Caldwell, and not the mangled remains of his aircraft, so a gratis helicopter lift was not going to be forthcoming from that source. Subsequently, an approach was made to Bristow Helicopters Ltd, of Redhill Aerodrome in Surrey, and the Managing Director and Chief Executive, Mr Brian Collins, very generously agreed to sponsor the project with the use of a Sikorski 76 helicopter and crew on the March spring tide date.

On Tuesday, March 9, 1993, a fine, warm and clear day, apparently not unlike that on which P8208 had come to grief, Sergeant Baelz waved in Bristow's machine to land in the field behind the sea wall. Captain Martin Forde, Bristow's chief pilot, kindly agreed to fly a shuttle service to land our party and equipment out at the site. Everyone was naturally delighted at not having to negotiate the quicksand, and soon the first party was away. Landing in the S-76 out on the shale, which had the consistency of rough tarmac, we discovered the pile of wreckage relatively intact, but covered in sand.

Once everyone had been flown out to the site, the party split, some digging away at the cockpit area, others to free the pile, and the remainder loading the items into the helicopter. The Robinson again appeared on the horizon and aviation artist and team-member, Mark Postlethwaite, flew with Peter to take aerial photographs of the site and work in progress. Another bone was discovered, but we were all doubtful that it was human, and this was also later confirmed as animal.

With the site having been completely cleared, Chris called 'time', and Martin began flying a shuttle service back to shore. Leaving the site, we were all elated at the success of the recovery side of the operation, and at the project's value as a public relations exercise, the Malvern Spitfire and RAF Aircraft Salvage Teams having worked together as one. Nevertheless, there was an element of sadness as we had not achieved our original objective which was to find Sergeant Caldwell.

Dennis Williams is currently hard at work restoring the P8208 remains which we plan to display in a forthcoming major travelling exhibition dedicated to the memory of the unfortunate pilot. A preliminary post-recovery examination of the wreckage has revealed many valuable items, including the maker's plate, detailing every modification that P8208 underwent, the reflector gunsight with its glass prism intact, and a host of other fascinating relics. Dennis reports on the condition of Spitfire P8208:

'The first remains recovered included the de Havilland constant speed propeller, unfortunately minus the distinctive hub cylinder. Six valves were all that remained of the once powerful Merlin engine, although fortunately the brass plate bearing both the Rolls-Royce and Air Ministry serials had survived. Cockpit items included the blind flying panel with part of the artificial horizon attached, pieces of the plastic instrument panel, the clock, the carbon dioxide cylinder for emergency undercarriage actuation, the windscreen de-icer pump and the oxygen stop-cock. The tail-wheel, with its leg and shock absorber strut, was also present, as was one of the two under-wing oil coolers. Finally, the two Hispano 20mm cannon were retrieved virtually intact, together with one of the empty case ejector chutes.

'My first impression upon assessing this wreckage for preservation was the relatively minor damage to most of the components. For example, although the propeller blades had each deformed rearwards, on dismantling

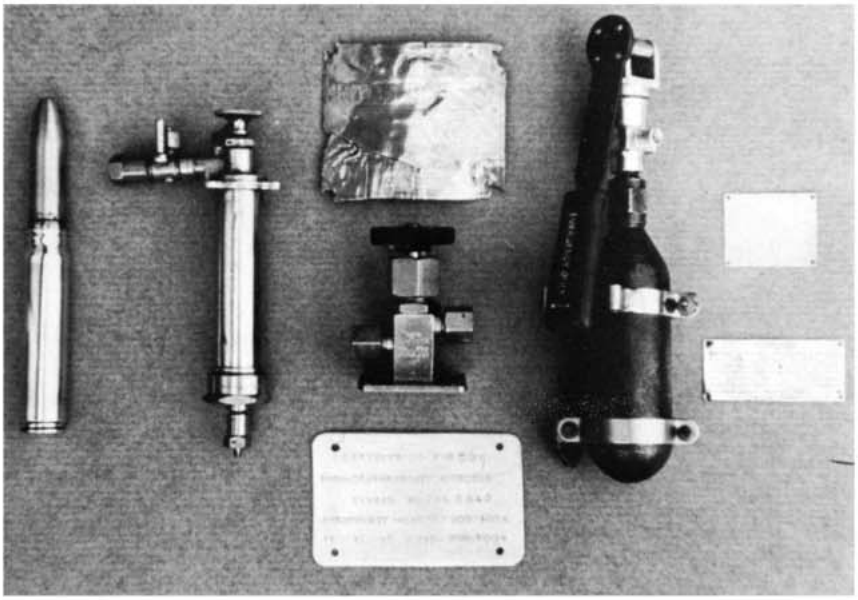
Dr Dennis Williams hard at work restoring P8208's de Havilland propeller unit having dismantled same. (Dr D. J. Williams)

the only other crash damage was found to be cracking of the steel thrust races at the blade roots. The conclusion is that the aircraft impacted at relatively low airspeed, perhaps in a belly-landing or ditching, or possibly in a spin (i.e. in a stalled, rotating condition, rather than in a spiral dive in which the airspeed would have been high).

'Stainless steel and brass items had survived with only superficial damage, but most remarkable were the chrome plated oleo rams on the main undercarriage legs which had suffered practically no attack from the sea water. However, corrosion damage as a result of several decades of immersion in sea water had taken its toll, and for many thin-gauge ferrous components the decay was complete with only rusty impressions revealing their fossilised shapes. Much of the wreckage was covered in calcified deposits, ranging from easily removed barnacles to thick layers of scale.

'As cleaning of the parts has proceeded, chemical means have been used in preference to abrasion for treatment of the various alloys. Conservation versus restoration, and originality versus presentability, are always carefully considered, with the general aim being to preserve and display the items in a corrosion-free, "as crashed" state. However, in view of the excellent condition of some of the items, it has been possible to return them to working order, and this in itself is a tribute to the engineering standards applied to the Spitfire over fifty years ago.'

Although P8208 has risen like a phoenix, Sergeant Eldon Howard Caldwell remains 'missing, presumed killed', with no known grave. He is commemorated on Panel 186 of the Runnymede Memorial dedicated to all those Commonwealth airmen missing on operations in north-west Europe. At least, however, the participants of Operation 'Estuary' can be sure that nothing now remains at the site to be interfered with, and that no more could have been done, fifty years after the crash, to find this young Canadian.



A selection of items previously encrusted with barnacles having been subjected to Dennis Williams's attentions using a chemical cleaning process. L-R: a 20mm Hispano Suiza cannon shell, the windscreen de-icer pump (situated on the right-hand side of the cockpit), the Rolls-Royce maker's plate from the Merlin engine, the oxygen flow tap (again from the right-hand side of the cockpit, this item having actually been restored to working order), the aircraft identity plate proving beyond any doubt that the site investigated was that of P8208, the CO^2 bottle for actuation of the emergency undercarriage mechanism, the SU Carb plate, and a magazine feed plate. (Dr D. J. Williams)

We feel that this project is an example of what level of co-operation with the authorities can be achieved if only the subject is approached in the right manner, and a final accolade was added by the Ministry of Defence, who stated that 'It is a shame that not all aviation archaeological groups take the Malvern Spitfire Team's responsible attitude.'

This article is extracted from Dilip Sarkar's forthcoming book Through Peril to the Stars, *each chapter of which tells the story of a fighter pilot who failed to return from an operation over north-west Europe with many previously unpublished photographs. Published by Ramrod Publications, 8 Hornyold Avenue, Malvern, Worcs WR14 1QJ. Price £17.95*

Members of the Malvern Spitfire Team, RAF Aircraft Salvage Team and Bristow Helicopters Ltd pose with the S-76 sponsored by Bristow's to undertake the airlift. At second left is Dr Dennis Williams, the Malvern Spitfire Team's restoration and aeronautical engineering expert; fifth left Sergeant 'Tiny' Baelz of RAF St Athan's Aircraft Salvage Team; sixth left Captain Martin Forde, Bristow Helicopter's Chief Pilot; centre, the author; kneeling is Chris Carne, the local NRA bailiff, and at extreme right aviation artist Mark Postlethwaite. In the background is Peter Earp's Robinson, and in the foreground a quantity of wreckage recovered, including both substantial mainspar sections bearing undercarriage legs. (Mark Postlethwaite)

SUGAMO PRISON, TOKYO

By John L. Ginn

Sugamo Prison no longer exists except in official American and Japanese records, and in the memories of those who served time there as prisoners or guards. In its place now is a very expensive housing and shopping complex named Sunshine City, the location of the tallest building in Japan. In one corner of this complex is a small park where a large stone marks the location of the prison's gallows. A message in Japanese reads: 'Pray for Eternal Peace'.

Compared to other Japanese and American prisons, the life span of Sugamo was a short one. Constructed in the early 1920s and demolished in 1971, it was the best-constructed and most modern prison in Japan. The Japanese copied the architecture of Sugamo from some of the better European prisons.

Sugamo served two distinct functions during its existence. It held mostly political prisoners after its construction, and after the end of World War II, it held primarily war criminals — and their accomplices — who had caused the political prisoners to be imprisoned.

Located approximately six miles north-north-east of the Imperial Palace, near Ikebukuro Station in Toshima Ku, in Tokyo, Sugamo Prison was initially used for holding Japan's political prisoners. 'Political' included anyone the members of the military clique believed could interfere with their war goals. Into this category fell Communists, dissenters, spies, and anyone else whom the military felt should be imprisoned — for practically any reason. In 1938, a leader of the Tokyo-Yokohama Communist group, Shinichi Matsumoto, was picked up in a police round-up of suspects and kept in Sugamo Prison for a year without a hearing or trial. Many of Japan's leading publishers and journalists spent time in Sugamo for writing or publishing ideas detrimental to the aims and goals of the military. However, under Japanese administration, Sugamo was never fully occupied by prisoners.

The Japanese also executed prisoners there, two of the more important being Richard Sorge, a German spying for the USSR, and Hotsumi Ozaki, one of his top people. Ozaki was a Japanese citizen. Numerous others in this spy ring were discovered, tried, and imprisoned throughout Japan.

Sorge was an insider with the German Embassy, posing — with certified credentials — as a German correspondent. He provided two top German newspapers with many articles that pleased both the Germans and the Japanese. He had the complete confidence of Germany's ambassador, General Eugen Ott, while he set up a ring of spies that covered China, Indochina, Manchuria, the Philippines, Korea, and virtually all of Japan's Far East conquests. Sorge provided the Soviet Union with thousands of coded messages, keeping the Russian government completely informed of Japanese military actions and plans.

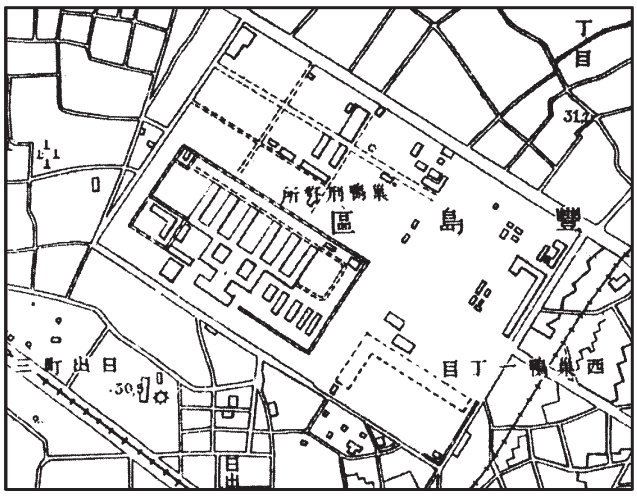
Sorge and Ozaki were hanged on November 7, 1944. Other members of the spy ring were imprisoned for terms of varying lengths. Some later perished in other prisons for lack of medical attention, and some were released when the American occupation forces liberated Japanese prisons.

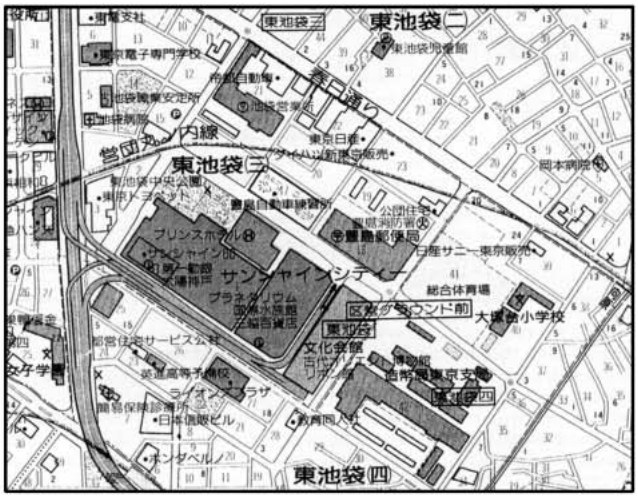
The trial of the major war criminals in Tokyo never received the worldwide attention that the Nuremberg trials did in Germany in 1945-46. Acting under the aegis of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE), the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General Douglas MacArthur, issued instructions for the rounding up of suspected Japanese war criminals in September 1945. His brief was to arrest all those believed of being implicated in war crimes beginning with the Mukden incident in September 1931 (the take-over of the Japanese government by the army clique which led to the war with China), and to categorise those arrested into Class A, B or C according to the rank of the alleged perpetrator. Tokyo's top security Sugamo Prison was selected for the detention of the suspects whilst awaiting trial and by November a master list had been drawn up. *Top:* **The main gate to the prison lay down this side road leading from the present day Kasuga Dori Avenue.** *Above:* **The prison was demolished in 1971 and in its place now stands the complex of Sunshine City, topped by the Sunshine 60 building. All present-day pictures were kindly taken for us by Yuichi Ishikawa.**

Other spies executed at Sugamo included five American agents. In July 1943, William J. Donovan, director of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), sent a six-man team into Japan as part of a B-29 bombing mission. They parachuted from the plane at night over Honshu, equipped with transmitters, Japanese currency, rations, and weapons. The Japanese soon realised that spies were reporting their convoy and troop movements to the Allies. Japan lost five ships in one convoy and four troop transports in another. Military units searched the countryside and eventually caught five of the OSS agents. They were taken to Sugamo, interrogated, and executed by hanging later in November 1944 — the same month as Sorge and Ozaki. (The sixth agent was never caught and continued to transmit ship movements to the US military. After the war he came in from the cold and served as a colonel with the occupation forces.)

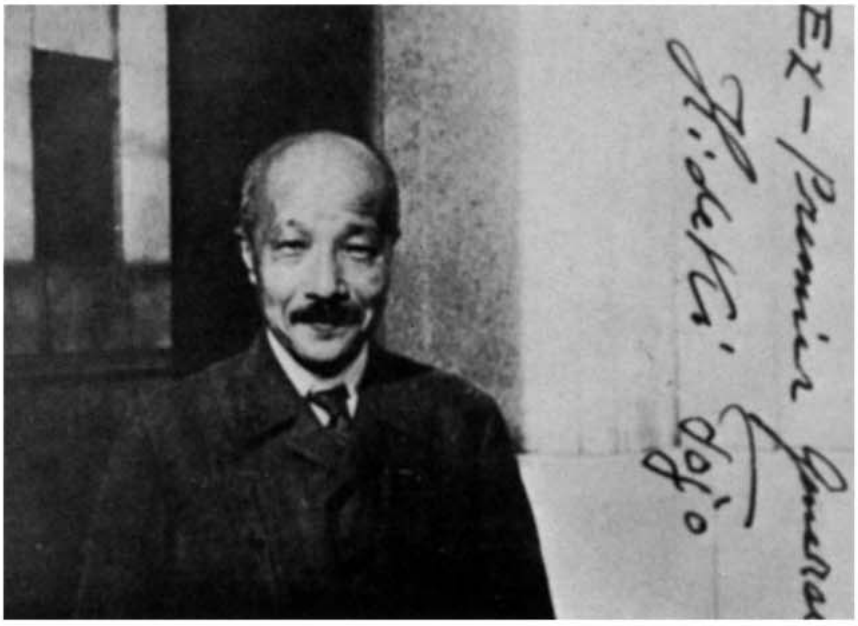
While under Japanese control, the prison was a single compound covering about six acres, enclosed by a thick, twelve-foot-high, reinforced concrete wall. The Japanese guards who served at the prison also lived within the compound. There they had their living quarters, kitchen, eating area, and minimal recreation facilities. The guards were supervised by a prison governor.

Top: **Then — looking westwards along the north perimeter wall at the rear of the prison.** *Above:* **Now — on the left, the Mitsukoshi department store.** *Below:* **Apart from the site of the prison itself having been redeveloped, feeder lanes for the elevated Shuto Expressway No. 5 actually disgorge traffic directly into the Sunshine City complex.**





General MacArthur delegated the arrest of the suspects to the Japanese police who were instructed to apprehend all those on the Class A list and have them report to Sugamo within ten days. Possibly, it was all part of MacArthur's plan to give them time to take the honourable way out but, in any event, the delay gave ample opportunity for the accused to commit suicide. Vice Admiral Takijiro Onishi, creator of the Kamikaze forces; War Minister Korechika Anami; General Shigeru Hondo, leader of the Kwantung Army military clique and planner of the Mukden incident; Field-Marshal Hajime Sugiyama; General Shizuichi Tanaka, the Eastern Army commander; Kumihiko Hashida, former Minister of Education; Chikahiko Koizumi, former Minister of Welfare and army surgeon general; and Prince Konoye, all elected to take their own lives. *Right:* **The most well known of those on the 'A' list was General Hideki Tojo, Minister of War and Prime Minister at the time of Pearl Harbor. He attempted to shoot himself in the heart on September 11 but, in spite of receiving a near-fatal wound, he survived to be admitted to Sugamo on December 8, 1945.**

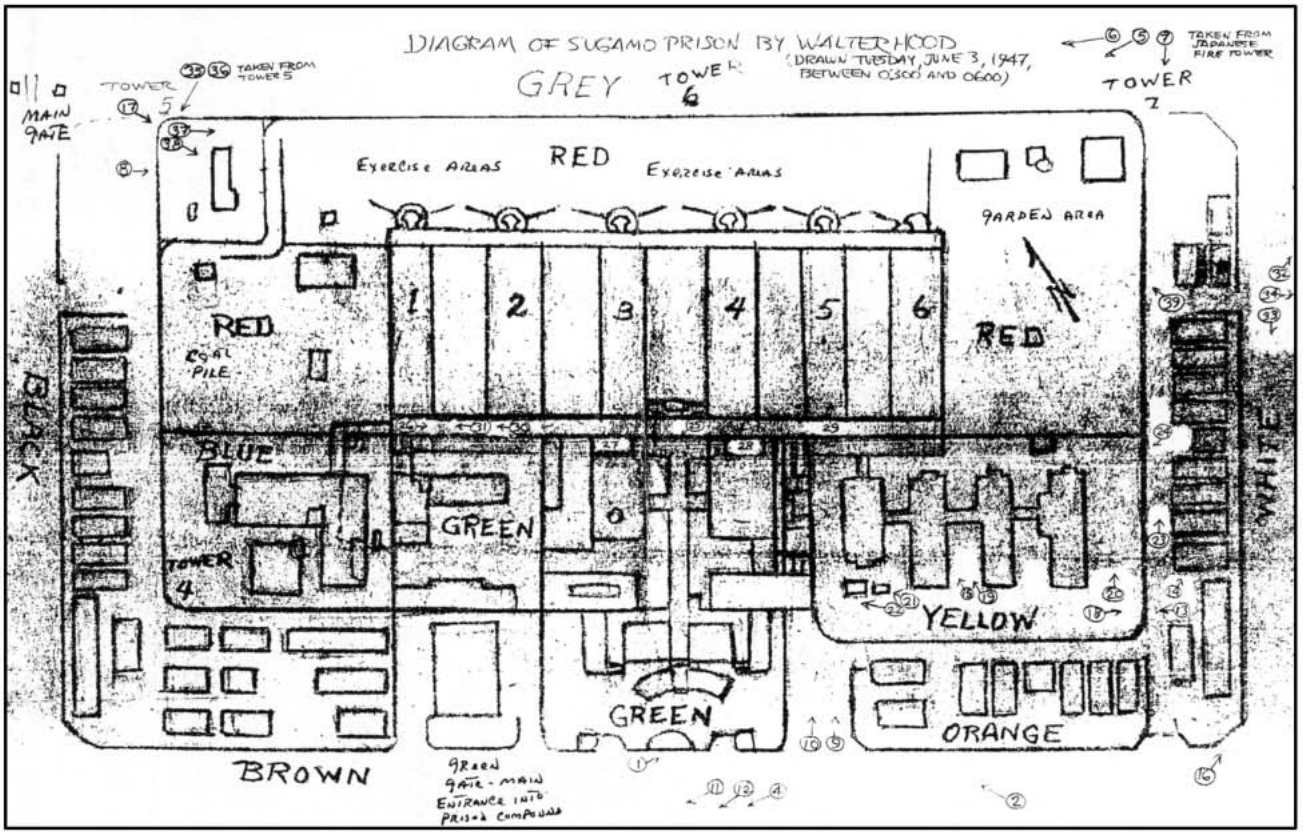


After the defeat of Japan, the Allied occupation forces began rounding up suspected Japanese war criminals early in September 1945. While Army troops were readying Sugamo Prison, other troops from the 35th AA Artillery Group, reinforced with two batteries from the 579th AAA, were guarding war criminal suspects at Omori Prison — designated as XI Corps Stockade 2. This prison, much smaller than Sugamo, was located on Omori Island — land reclaimed from Tokyo Bay. During the war, this facility had been a notorious PoW camp for Americans.

On December 8, 1945, the overcrowded Omori prisoners were transferred to Sugamo Prison — known then as XI Corps Stockade 1. The two batteries of troops serving at Sugamo provided guard duty and security around the clock.

One of the first prisoners to be processed into Sugamo Prison was General Hideki Tojo, premier of Japan's war cabinet. Ironically, the date and time listed on Tojo's basic personnel record was 14.40, December 8, 1945. This was exactly the same local time that Ambassador Nomura was sent into Secretary of State Cordell Hull's office in Washington, DC, in December 1941 to present Japan's final negotiation.

In March 1946, administration of the prison was assigned to the Eighth Army with headquarters in Yokohama. Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger was the commander.



During his research, John Ginn, author of *Sugamo Prison, Tokyo*, from which this article has been extracted, traced a Dr Walter K. Hood who in 1947 was serving as one of the US guards at the prison. He had been far-sighted enough to produce this plan and take numerous photographs, some of which are included here. Dr Hood explains that 'the use of color codes was to designate specific areas: BLACK for living quarters (mainly quonsets) for enlisted men; BROWN for service facilities such as the PX, Mess Hall, Motor Pool etc; GREEN for the administration areas, offices and chapel, ORANGE for officers' quarters and club; BLUE to indicate the female part of the prison; YELLOW for the hospital; WHITE for the guard quarters and RED for the cell blocks. The latter were numbered from 1 to 6, Nos. 1-4 being for Class C prisoners, No. 5 for Class A and No. 6 for Class A and B suspects. Each block except No. 6 had three floors referred to as Corridors A, B and C with A being the first (ground) floor.'

Dr Walter Hood: 'My photo No. 2 shows the administration building looking north-west from the open field in front of the prison.'

The prison's administration building was centrally located on the south side. It consisted of six long wings, of which five were three-story tiers of cells, and one a two-story tier. It was provided with exercise and labour yards, service areas, a laundry, and an execution building. There was also a smaller building, known as the Blue Prison, within this compound for women prisoners.

On occupying Sugamo Prison, the Eighth Army provided almost 500 troops to staff it. By mid-1947, the round-up of war criminals had netted approximately 2,000 prisoners and protected witnesses.

Ironically, two of the prisoners brought to Sugamo were Procurator General (former Justice Minister) Tsusei Iwamura; and Justice Minister Hiromasa Matsuzaki. (A procurator general has about the same authority in Japan as the attorney general in the United States.) In the past, both of these prisoners had had supervisory control of the prison, and both were well aware of the painstaking efforts taken to make it escape-proof.

An outer compound, encompassing about 12 acres, was built around the inner one, enlarging the prison area by 100 per cent. The outer boundary was protected by a ten-foot-high, 14-strand, barbed-wire fence. The wire fence surrounding the outer compound of Sugamo prison was not there to prevent the escape of prisoners but to prevent the Japanese from stealing coal and food from the Americans. (During the early years of the American occupation there was an abundance of cold and hungry Japanese citizens.)

This compound contained all the amenities and facilities the US Army strives to bestow on its personnel. These included Quonset huts for quarters; a mess hall and post exchange; officers' and enlisted men's clubs; and a post theatre and baseball and football fields. The football field also served as a track for exercising and a parade ground for troop formations and ceremonies. There was an orderly room for the records and files of all personnel serving at Sugamo; a bowling alley (the first in Japan); an armoury; a motor pool; a snack bar; and a Red Cross Service Club at which monthly or bi-monthly dances were held and at which GIs could play ping-pong tournaments, checkers, and chess matches.

Improvements to the prison itself began almost immediately after the Americans arrived. On the priority list were the heating, cooling, and ventilation systems and repairs to the medical facilities. The prison took on a new look as both the exterior and interior were painted with brighter colours. The grounds were landscaped, trees and shrubbery planted, and new buildings erected. Some of the improvements created confusion among the prisoners because they were required to move from one cell-block to another without explanation while repairs and improvements were made.

'I took this photograph [No. 5] of the six cell blocks of Sugamo Prison,' noted Dr Hood, 'looking west-south-west from a Japanese fire tower not on the prison grounds. The old wooden Tower 6, near the mid-point of the north wall, is seen to the left of the foreground tower. A segment of the barbed wire fence that surrounded the prison grounds appears in the bottom right. I knew this area rather well, having climbed over the fence one night when I arrived in Ikebukuro after midnight due to poor train connections.'

A present day visitor can still sleep on the site of the cell blocks — if one books into the Prince Hotel!

In 1948, when the war crimes trials were being concluded, security was strengthened with guard towers, jeep patrols, and a main gate manned 24 hours a day by double guards. There were also special details to watch and guard the prisoners inside the prison and to transport Class A prisoners to Tokyo by bus, and Class C prisoners to Yokohama by army bus or truck, to be tried.

Class A war criminals were those accused of 'crimes against peace' — namely, the planning, preparation, initiation, or waging of a declared or undeclared war of aggression; or a war in violation of international law, treaties, agreements or assurances; or participation in a common plan or conspiracy for the accomplishment of any of the foregoing.

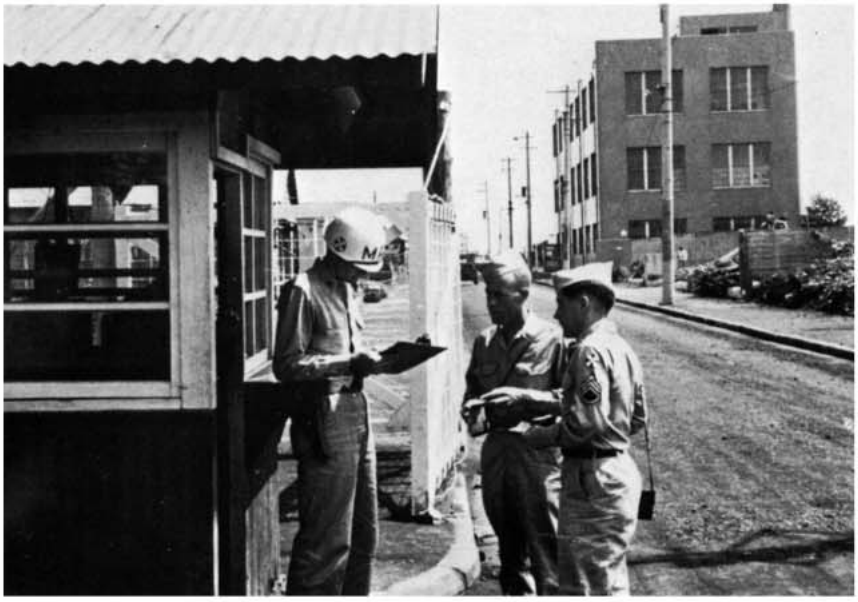
Class B criminals were those charged with conventional war crimes — namely, 'violations of the laws or customs of war'. Such violations included, but were not limited to, murder, ill-treatment or deportation to slave labour or for any other purpose of the civilian population of, or in, occupied territory; murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war or persons on the seas or elsewhere; improper treatment of hostages; plunder of public or private property; and wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages or devastation not justified by military necessity.

Class C criminals were those accused of 'crimes against humanity' — namely, murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, and other inhumane acts committed during Japan's war with China and World War II or persecutions on political or racial grounds in execution of, or in connection with, any crime within the jurisdiction of the tribunal, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country where the crimes were perpetrated. Leaders, organizers, instigators, and accomplices participating in the formulation or execution of a common plan or conspiracy to commit any of the foregoing crimes were deemed to be responsible for all acts performed by any person in the execution of such plans.

In August 1947 the US Army newspaper *Stars and Stripes Review* published the following article about Sugamo Prison and its operation:

'Sugamo Prison, a network of modern, well-landscaped buildings of pale tan concrete, stands in a Tokyo residential section which has been reduced to ashes and wastelands by wartime incendiary bombing. It stands as an example to the world both of American justice and of humane, efficient prison management.

'Here the Provost Marshal Section of Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger's Eighth Army has confined the 1,100 Japanese nationals accused or convicted of war crimes. Many former PoW guards and army generals, civilians and politicians are serving sentences

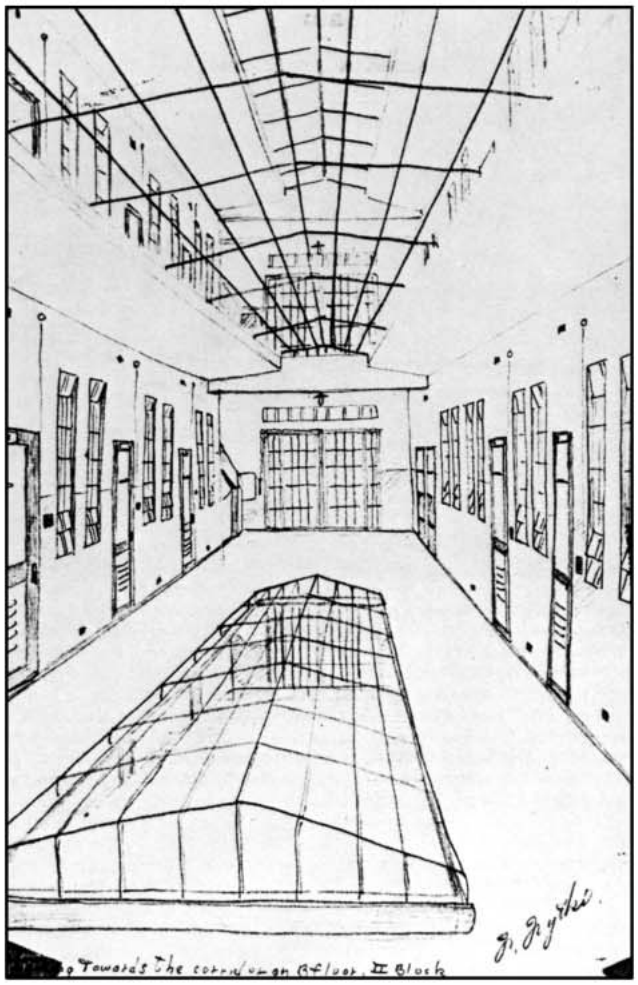


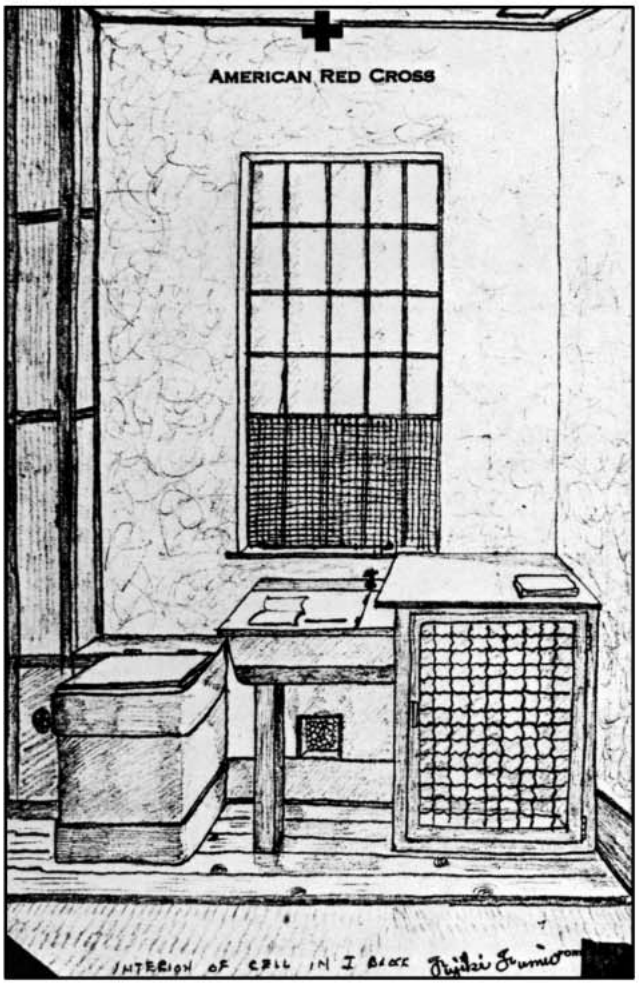
Corporal William Bickwermert, wearing the red and white insignia of the Eighth Army on his helmet, carries out a pass check at the main gate on Sergeant Ray Bullock and Sergeant Thurman Keeble. (See Walter Hood's plan on page 46 for the location.)

Once inside the outer compound, entry to the prison itself was via the Green Gate in front of the administration building.

The trial of the major Class A Japanese war criminals began on May 3, 1946 in a courtroom constructed in the former auditorium of the Japanese War College (due to be demolished in 1994) in

Tokyo. The trial lasted for two years and 98 days during which time the defendants were taken each day to the court in a blacked out coach, escorted by Jeeps.





As well as the Class A prisoners, some 2,000 other individuals were rounded up between 1945 and 1948 and held in Sugamo. Of these, 1,002 were tried by five-man military commissions appointed by the Eighth Army acting for the IMTFE. Trials began at Eighth Army HQ at Yokohama on December 18, 1945, the last one ending on October 3, 1949. The Class B defendants were mostly high-ranking officers whose troops had committed atrocities, all the others indicted falling into Class C. One of the latter was Sergeant Fumio Fujiki, tried in Case 287 at Yokohama on February 13, 1948, and sentenced to six years hard labour. While imprisoned in Sugamo, he completed these drawings which accurately portray the interior.

ranging from a few months to life imprisonment at hard labour. But the majority are awaiting trial. Of these, many will be released without trial and others may be acquitted. Although new suspects are constantly being found and brought to the prison, it is expected that all prisoners will be either tried or released by early next year.

'The prison was originally built by the Japanese during the decade leading up to the war. Here prisoners awaited trials during months and often years of physical privation and brutal treatment from guards. Two years ago, Eighth Army Provost Marshal Section took it over for temporary confinement of war crime suspects.

'Today, from the outside, only high walls and watch-towers betray the purpose of these buildings. The windows, even the walls of the buildings, are clean. Trees and carefully cultivated gardens surround the buildings, with a large vegetable garden at one end of the premises.

'The interior displays a recent paint job and the cleanliness of a hospital. Prisoners are required to scrub their cells several times a week, and to keep them in order at all times. Each cell contains a table and chair, electric light, straw floor mat, and a covered lavatory.

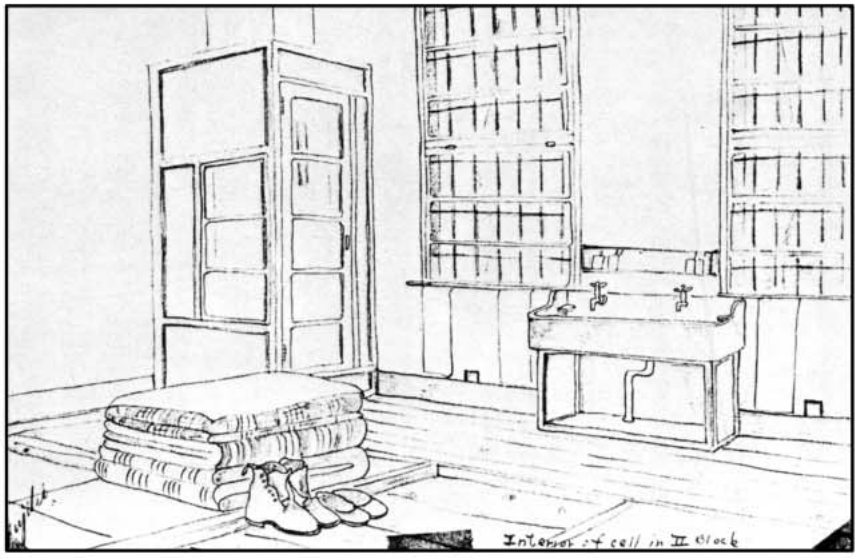
'The prisoners themselves are in good health. They wear clean uniforms which are washed and ironed by a laundry on the premises.

'The prison staff goes beyond mere accommodation of basic physical needs in trying to arrange for the prisoners a decent life.

'Prisoners are encouraged to practise religion. Christian services are conducted for them, and a Buddhist altar with a Japanese priest in attendance is available to them.

'The Chaplain, Captain John A. Ryan, has obtained through the Red Cross many books written in both English and Japanese and has set up a rotating library for the prisoners. Although few of them can speak or understand (oral) English, most can read and write it.

'Humane treatment of war crime suspects does not imply softness or inefficiency. Each soldier has well defined duties, which he must carry out correctly. A thorough system of guards has prevented even an attempted escape from the prison. Prisoners eat, work, or exercise at specified times. The complex



Perhaps the most famous prisoner at Sugamo to those Americans who fought in the Pacific Theater was Iva D'Aguina (née Toguri) — better known as Tokyo Rose. She was an American citizen who became stranded in Japan when the war started. Because she later broadcast on Radio Tokyo's English language programme, she was arrested by the Americans in September 1945 and spent a year in Blue Prison *(right)* **before being released for lack of evidence.** *Left:* **Here she is seen leaving the prison for the United States where she was re-arrested. She was pre-tried by the Press, convicted of treason in 1949 and sentenced to ten years, fined $10,000, and stripped of her US citizenship. Having served 6½ years in prison, the miscarriage of justice was finally acknowledged in 1977 when President Ford granted her a free pardon.**

machinery of prison operations functions with precision.

'The staff follows careful procedures to prevent spread of disease. Every incoming prisoner is inoculated against the same diseases as is the American soldier entering the theatre. He receives a thorough physical examination and any necessary medical attention. A doctor remains on duty 24 hours a day in case of emergency.

'The mess personnel observe rigid regulations to ensure sanitation. The kitchen is kept immaculate. The Japanese workers are required to take showers and to don clean uniforms every morning before starting work.

'Colonel Francis W. Crary of St Louis, Missouri, commanding officer, considers that the success of Sugamo depends upon the character of the men operating it. He desires discipline and prompt, precise performance of duty from them. But he especially wants them to live up to democratic ideals. He operates the prison on the principles that a man is not guilty until convicted and even then remains a human being.

'Mr. E. L. Carr, noted author, sums up one's impression of the prison as follows: "The first impression a visitor gets of Sugamo Prison, Tokyo — where the Japanese charged with war crimes are imprisoned — is one of tremendous, purposeful, and kindly alertness on the part of the US officers and men charged with guarding the prisoners. They seem interested in their work, fully conscious of the possibilities of mistakes, and yet there is no sign of the arrogance and cruelty which stained the records of Japanese and Nazis alike. Every conceivable precaution is taken to be sure that Tojo and his accomplices meet their just deserts, but the routine of confinement is accomplished without whip-cracking or torture chambers. A visit to Sugamo makes one proud of democracy, and even prouder of the men it breeds." '

In 1948 a prisoners' vegetable garden was established in the inner, and later in the outer, compound. This not only assisted greatly in providing better meals to the prisoners but markedly improved morale among them. Some of the prisoners had served time in other Japanese prisons. They told their guards that Sugamo was being operated in an improved and more humane manner than they had ever experienced before.

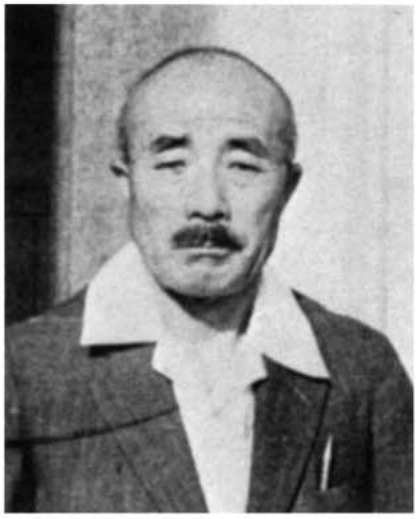
There were still many who complained about one thing or another, however. One frequent complaint was about the difference in the financial status between the American guards and the prisoners. They could see the Americans smoking at will and eating whenever they were hungry, while for the prisoners, both tobacco and food were rationed. Although the Americans were improving the conditions at Sugamo, they had no intention of allowing the prisoners to fare better than the Japanese civilian population.

Within the administration building was a large, centrally located meeting room. This room, converted into a chapel, or religious room, was used by both the prisoners and the Americans. The Americans used it on Sundays, and the Japanese used it during the week or whenever the appointed prison Buddhist priest, Dr. Shinsho Hanayama, decided to conduct religious services or perform last-rite ceremonies. Some American soldiers were married and others had their children baptised in this chapel.

Shortly before the Korean War began, an American officer, Captain Lonnie Adams, was assigned to Sugamo as prison officer. After meeting with his top NCOs and the leading inmates, he determined that prisoner morale was very low. He requested and received permission from the commanding officer to allow the prisoners more time in the exercise yards outside their cells, and improvements were made in the weekly Sugamo newspaper.

When the Korean War began in 1950, there was a shortage of soldiers at hand. This deficit was partially made up with GIs stationed at various military installations throughout Japan. At Sugamo, the officers were reduced from 40 to 7 and the enlisted men from more than 400 to less than 100. All executions of condemned war criminals had been completed by April 7, 1950. Shortly after that, prisoners serving terms were beginning to be paroled. At this time, the Japanese penal system began replacing some of the GIs with Japanese guards.

Looking across the road underneath the Shuto Expressway to where the Sunshine 60 building now stands squarely on the site of the old Blue Prison block.



While the IMTFE realised that there was no possible way of bringing to trial all those responsible for crimes committed across the Far East, China, and the Pacific Islands, the basic idea of the war crimes trials was, like Nuremberg, to set an example. The original 28 Class A defendants had been shortlisted from a total of 84 civilian and military leaders held at Sugamo, each of the Allied nations represented on the IMTFE being allowed to indict two Class A captives. Yosuke Matsuoka and Admiral Osami Nagamo died before the trial had finished and Dr Shumei Okawa was committed to a psychiatric hospital. On November 4, 1948, the court reconvened after a six-month recess to hand down the verdicts on the remaining 25. Seven received death sentences: General Tojo (page 46); General Kenji Doihara *(left)*, one-time commander of the Kwantung Army and member of the Supreme War Council; Baron Koki Hirota *(centre)*, Foreign Minister at the time of the Nanking massacres; and General Seishiro Itagaki *(right)*, Minister of War 1938-39, Chief of the Army General Staff 1939, later a member of the Supreme War Council.

Captain Adams called a meeting of prisoners and told them of his manpower shortage and that he had two choices: he could either lock them up and keep them locked up, or they could elect to govern themselves. They quickly told him that they could govern themselves without any problems. They did so, and there were no major disciplinary problems.

Some of the inmates volunteered to assist in any way with the Korean conflict, including combat. Three hundred were put to work at a large hydroponic farm near Tokyo and greatly increased vegetable production. Other inmates volunteered to work on a project constructing wooden pallets for the war effort and consistently surpassed the production goals initially set by Captain Adams and later by themselves.

At the same time, Captain Adams was making life more bearable for the prisoners. The prison hospital was enlarged, an X-ray machine and X-ray technician were put in place, along with a medical laboratory and facilities for tuberculosis patients. A school was built, and an education program was begun. Dr Tochima, the Buddhist priest who replaced Dr Hanayama, greatly assisted Captain Adams in organising the school, Classes were conducted in automobile mechanics, library science, the abacus, art, photography, tatami and shoemaking and repair, and English.

As the American medical personnel at Sugamo were phased out for the Korean War effort, Japanese doctors and medical technicians were brought in. There was even an obstetrician on duty. Sugamo was about halfway between several large American housing complexes and Tokyo, and after many pregnant American wives failed to make it into Tokyo in time for delivery, arrangements were made to have a qualified doctor at the prison hospital. He was kept relatively busy.

Room was also found for a prison library, and donations of books reached five thousand by 1950. A goldfish pond and an aviary were established, with the Japanese people donating fish and birds in abundance. An entertainment program was initiated to bring theatre productions to the post theatre. Sumo wrestling matches were conducted on the football field in the outer compound, and track meets and May Day exercises were attended by the majority of the inmates.

INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL FOR THE FAR EAST
SENTENCES FOR THE CLASS A JAPANESE DEFENDANTS

	Count										Sentence
	1	27	29	31	32	33	35	36	54	55	
General Sadao Araki	G	G	NG	NG	NG	NG	NG	NG	NG	NG	Life
General Kenji Doihara	G	G	G	G	G	NG	G	G	G	NG	Death
Colonel Kingoro Hashimoto	G	G	NG	NG	NG	NI	NI	NI	NG	NG	Life
Field Marshal Shunroku Hata	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NG	NG	NG	G	Life
Baron Kiichiro Hiranuma	G	G	G	G	G	NG	NG	G	NG	NG	Life
Baron Koki Hirota	G	G	NG	NG	NG	NG	NG	NI	NG	G	Death
Naoki Hoshino	G	G	G	G	G	NG	NG	NI	NG	NG	Life
General Seishiro Itagaki	G	G	G	G	G	NG	G	G	G	NF	Death
Okinori Kaya	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NI	NG	NG	Life
Marquis Koichi Kido	G	G	G	G	G	NG	NG	NG	NG	NG	Life
General Heitaro Kimura	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NI	G	G	Death
General Kuniaki Koiso	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NG	NG	G	Life
General Iwane Matsui	NG	NG	NG	NG	NG	NI	NG	NG	NG	G	Death
General Jiro Minami	G	G	NG	NG	NG	NI	NI	NI	NG	NG	Life
General Akira Muto	G	G	G	G	G	NG	NI	NG	G	G	Death
Admiral Takasumi Oka	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NI	NG	NG	Life
General Hiroshi Oshima	G	NG	NG	NG	NG	NI	NI	NI	NG	NG	Life
General Kenro Sato	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NI	NG	NG	Life
Mamoru Shigemitsu	NG	G	G	G	G	G	NG	NI	NI	G	7 years
Admiral Shigetaro Shimada	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NI	NG	NG	Life
Toshio Shiratori	G	NG	NG	NG	NG	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	Life
General Teiichi Suzuki	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NG	NG	NG	Life
Shigenori Togo	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NG	NG	NG	20 years
General Hideki Tojo	G	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NG	G	NF	Death
General Yoshijiro Umezu	G	G	G	G	G	NI	NI	NG	NG	NG	Life

G — Guilty NG — Not guilty NF — No finding NI — Not indicted on a specific count

Count 1 — were leaders, organisers, instigators, or accomplices in the formulation or execution of a common plan or conspiracy to wage wars of aggression and wars in violation of international law.
Count 27 — waging unprovoked aggressive war in China.
Count 29 — waging aggressive war against the United States.
Count 31 — waging aggressive war against the British Commonwealth.
Count 32 — waging aggressive war against the Netherlands.
Count 33 — waging aggressive war against French Indo-China.
Count 35 — waging aggressive war against the USSR in Siberia.
Count 36 — waging aggressive war against the USSR in Mongolia.
Count 54 — Ordered, authorised and permitted inhumane treatment of prisoners of war and others.
Count 55 — Deliberately and recklessly disregarded their duty to take adequate steps to prevent atrocities.

Also pictured on the steps of the Ichigawa court building, General Heitaro Kimura *(left)*, **Vice Minister for War; General Iwane Matsui** *(centre)*, **Commander in Chief of the Central China Area Army which captured Nanking in December 1937; and General Akira Muto** *(right)*, **commanding the 2nd Imperial Guards Division responsible for atrocities in Sumatra.**

During the first year of the Korean War, many Korean and Chinese spies serving as maids, waiters, waitresses, and clerks were arrested near American military headquarters buildings and in nearby hotels and restaurants throughout Japan. Sugamo received 60 women prisoners, whom Captain Adams confined in Blue Prison. At that time he was using Japanese women as prison matrons, but later these were replaced by matrons from the federal penal system in the United States. Male spies were housed in cell block No. 5, guarded by incoming Japanese replacement guards. These prisoners were tried and sentenced or acquitted.

In September 1951, all the foreign nationals being held at the Eighth Army Stockade were transferred to Sugamo. The 'Big Eight' stockade was located about five miles south-east of Sugamo, and before the end of the war it had been called Toyotama Prison. The transfer involved almost 300 prisoners, who were confined in cell block No. 1. These prisoners were held until shortly after the peace treaty with Japan was signed, at which time they were transferred to a Japanese prison south of Yokohama. They were mostly Korean and Chinese. However, there were some Filipinos, Indonesians, and other Orientals convicted of murder, robbery, rape, petty theft, and dealing in narcotics. Many of them were on narcotics at the time of their transfer.

By the time that the Japanese peace treaty was signed in September 1951, the Japanese were in almost total control of the prison. They were gradually moved in and trained to run Sugamo Prison as American personnel were transferred out and were in complete control by May 1952. The numbers of prisoners released on parole increased. By 1956 the total number of war criminals was down from more than 2,000 to 383. These were all long-term prisoners convicted of the most serious offenses. By December 1958, Sugamo's doors and gates were closed, the remaining prisoners pardoned, and its official use as a prison ended. There was no ceremony, no newspaper notice, and no photographs.

Following the rejection of petitions for those sentenced to death, the executions were set for 12.01 a.m. on December 23, 1948. The execution block *(centre)* **was situated in the extreme north-west corner of the Sugamo prison compound. The chief hangman was Lieutenant Charles Rexroad, the Theater Executioner.** *Right:* **Today a memorial stone has been set up in a small garden which now occupies the site of the gallows. Its message is simple: 'Pray for Eternal Peace'.**

The last officer to leave Sugamo was Captain Lonnie B. Adams, Jr. He reported: 'You would never have known that the prison had changed over from the Americans to the Japanese unless you had actually been there.'

There are no records of anyone ever escaping from Sugamo while it was under US military jurisdiction. Slightly more than 2,000 war criminals and protected witnesses were held there for varying periods of time. There were several suicides and several attempted suicides.

In 1971 the prison was purchased from the Japanese government for $17.7 million by the Japan Urban Development Company. In its place rose a housing and shopping complex, relieving pressure on a congested area of Tokyo.

None of the Class A prisoners given life sentences served their full term and all had been paroled and pardoned by 1958. Another 40 Class A prisoners were released without trial. Of the 371 trials at Yokohama involving Class B and C accused, 119 ended in the death penalty of which 53 were carried out at Sugamo. Today nothing remains, the dominating feature at Sugamo being the 60-storey-high tower block of Sunshine City.

Sergant Fred Barwise from Florida, an ex-GI from Sugamo on his way from the States to Vietnam, stopped in Tokyo for several days in 1971. He decided to pay a visit to his old stomping grounds. He reports: 'I went out to see Sugamo, and the wrecking ball was set up and demolishing the walls. However, the NCO Club, theatre and most of the buildings near the main gate were intact. I turned around, walked out the main gate, and thought to myself: "Fred, you could very well be the last Sugamo GI to see Sugamo." '

This article is extracted from John L. Ginn's book Sugamo Prison, Tokyo, An Account of the Trial and Sentencing of Japanese War Criminals in 1948 by a U.S. Participant *published by McFarland & Company, Inc. Readers interested in purchasing a copy of this excellent account of the Pacific war's equivalent to the Nuremberg trials of Europe should write to the publishers at PO Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina, 28640 or telephone 919-246-4460. Price of the book is $37.00 post paid, and credit card purchases are accepted.*

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